

TOP DOCS 2025

Richmond

magazine

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PROS
IN 94 CATEGORIES

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CLINICAL
RESEARCH

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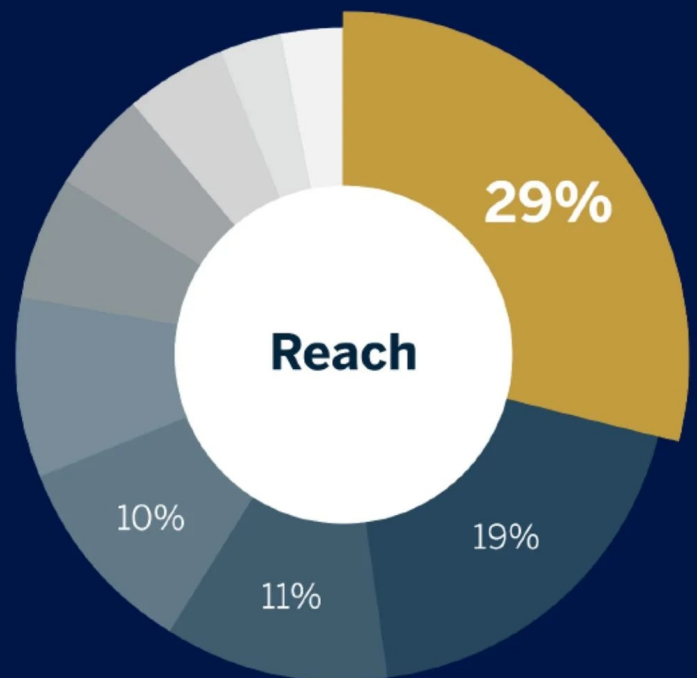
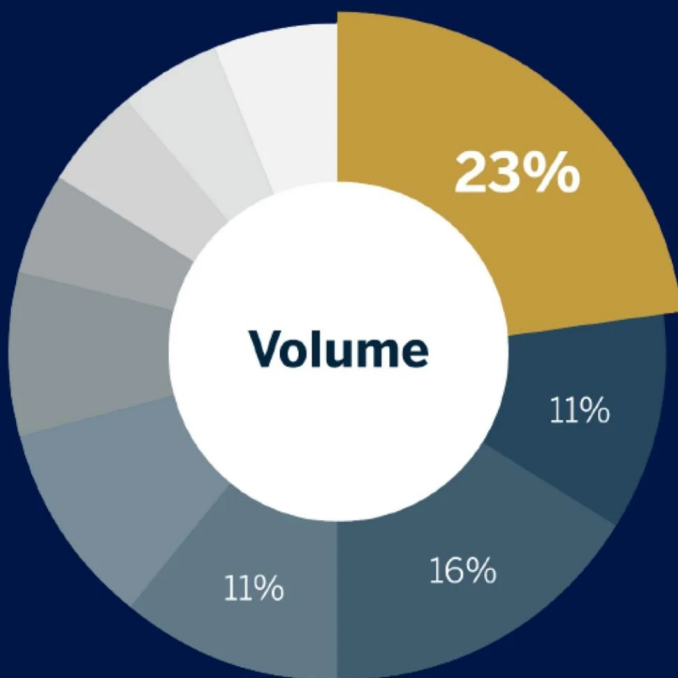
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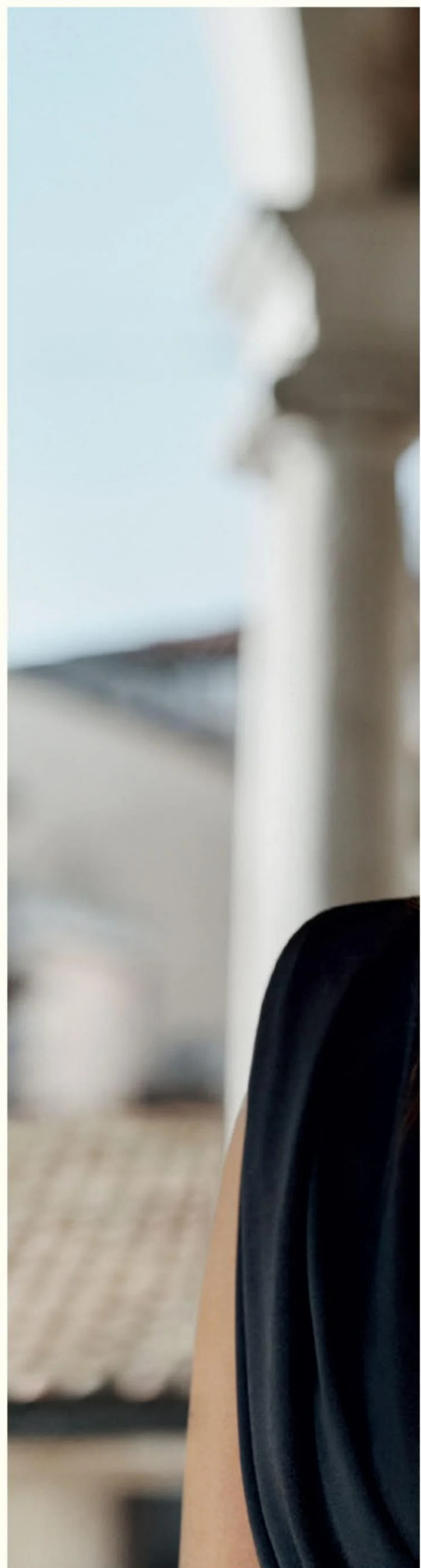
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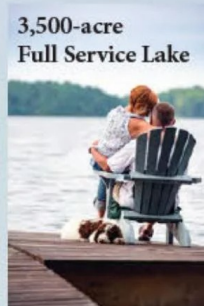
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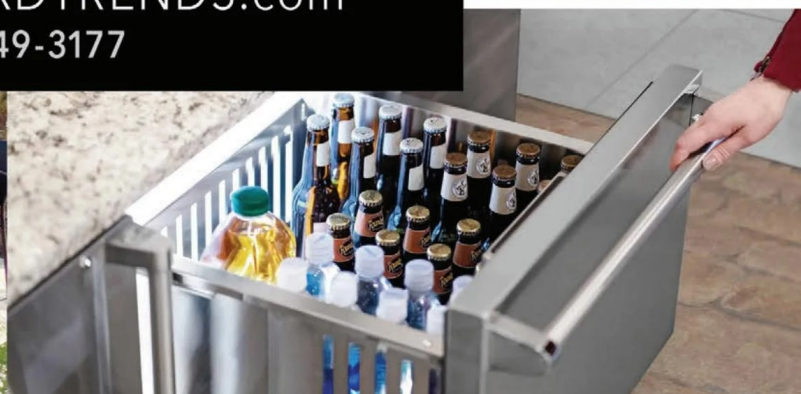
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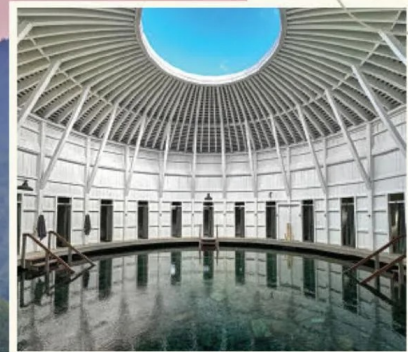


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For more than a decade, Charles Payne served as a Richmond EMT and VCU Medical Center Emergency Department staff member. He says that responding to calls all over the city provided him an invaluable education in humanity.

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APRIL



70

TOP DOCS 2025

Richmond's leading role in clinical research, plus 443 of the region's top medical pros, as chosen by their peers

By Tharon A. Giddens

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HAIL MARY

Women's football in Richmond is racking up the yards

By Adam Cheek

DEPARTMENTS



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CORRECTIONS

In "The Quest for Quirky" (March 2025) we identified Primland Resort as located in Stuart, Virginia; it is actually located in Meadows of Dan, Virginia. In the same story, we misidentified an image of the resort's vacation rental as a treehouse cabin; an image of a treehouse cabin is now available online.

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BONUS

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RVA TRAVELER

Look for the Spring/Summer edition of RVA Traveler, your guide to Virginia and regional getaways, inserted after Page 128



ON THE COVER

Photo by: Adam Ewing

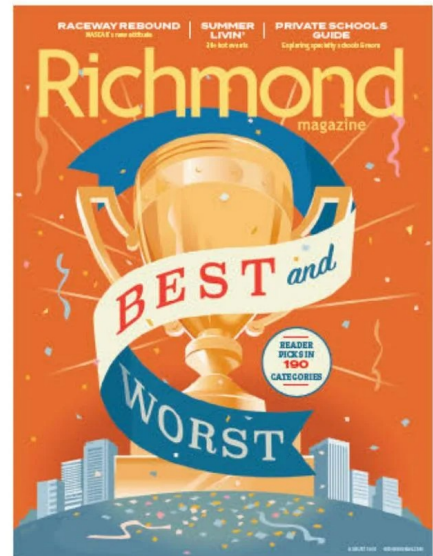


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NEWS EDITOR: Mark Newton

ASSOCIATE EDITOR: Kelsey Robinson

SENIOR WRITER: Harry Kollatz Jr.

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS:

Adam Cheek, Bird Cox, Tharon A. Giddens, Valerie Hubbard, Rachel Kester, Allison Kinney, Laura Anders Lee, Gray Pershing, D. Hunter Reardon, Joyelle Ronan, Kari Smith, Matthew Sporn, Genevelyn Steele, Joan Tupponce

EDITORIAL INTERNS: Melody Yuan, Mary Margaret Clouse, Nati Feliciano

SENIOR ART DIRECTOR:

Rachel Lee

ASSOCIATE ART DIRECTOR: Kyle Talley

GRAPHIC DESIGNERS:

Phong Nguyen, Abbi Bennett

SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER: Jay Paul

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS:

Ash Daniel, Adam Ewing, Marcus Ingram

CONTRIBUTING ILLUSTRATORS:

Blake Cale, Abby Giuseppe

SENIOR ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE:

Martha Hebert

PRODUCTION AND OPERATIONS MANAGER: Scott Bunce

**SENIOR DIRECTOR OF MARKETING,
SUBSCRIPTIONS AND CLIENT RELATIONS:** R.J. Landin
SUBSCRIPTIONS ASSOCIATE: David Ballowe

VICE PRESIDENT/CONTROLLER: Elisa Malkman

EDITORIAL & ADVERTISING OFFICES:

1910 Byrd Ave., Suite 100, Richmond, VA 23230

MAILING ADDRESS:

P.O. Box 5070, Glen Allen, VA 23058

Telephone: 804-355-0111 Main Fax: 804-355-5442

Editorial and Art Fax: 804-355-8939 Email: editor@richmag.com

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from the
EDITOR
MINDY KINSEY



FORWARD-FACING

Just when you think an old city can't learn new tricks, Richmond is quietly growing into a U.S. hub for clinical research.

Last year alone, area researchers received \$115 million in federal funding plus additional private investments to support hundreds of clinical trials. The projects might include testing new medications, trying updated diagnostics or changing the way care is delivered, all with the goal of providing better care and saving lives. Trials for chemotherapy, drugs to treat diabetes and heart disease, and the first COVID-19 vaccines have all taken place in Richmond.

It's a bit of a chicken-and-egg question to determine whether the region has become a popular site for trials due to the funding or whether our institutions receive funding because we have robust health and research systems, a central location, and a population that's both diverse and willing to volunteer to advance medicine. Suffice to say, Richmond

is now home to an outsized number of doctors and scientists, many associated with clinical trials.

That they bring opportunities to participate in cutting-edge clinical trials is invaluable if you have the misfortune to develop a serious illness but might seem of limited benefit to the community. However, we're all a little healthier and a little wealthier thanks to a wide range of high-quality medical care; jobs in construction, service and support; and, frankly, an influx of spending from both their families and patients from around the world who to come to Rich-

mond for treatment. Read about the importance of clinical trials to the region — and the world — beginning on Page 70. Our annual list of Top Doctors follows the story.

I was delighted to learn last fall that Richmond is growing in another way, as well. The area is home to not one, not two, but three women's tackle football teams and a flag football team, too! Women's football has grown in popularity in recent years — and the flag version will be an Olympic sport in 2028 — but there are fewer than 100 tackle teams nationwide, so it's wild that we have three. And

Richmond definitely liked it before it was cool; the Black Widows are marking their 10th year of play this season. Meet the teams starting on Page 78.

Also in this issue, we highlight the debut of "Loving v. Virginia" by the Virginia Opera, remember (or learn) the city's official flower, explore spring menus, plan summer getaways with RVA Traveler and more. Enjoy! 



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from the
PUBLISHER
RICHARD MALKMAN



A FIRST TIME FOR EVERYTHING

Welcome to our 37th annual Top Docs issue, a project that began in 1988 with a mail-in ballot sent to a long list of area physicians. Doctors didn't really compete back then and definitely weren't prepared for Hollywood "best actor" type balloting. We had to walk them through the process, including filling out the survey and mailing it back in a pre-labeled envelope. (We made it very easy for them.)

When the Top Docs list was published that first year, our readers didn't know what to make of it. They were amazed that doctors would get involved, and they loved that many of the names were physicians they knew. They also appreciated the service we were providing, because the list made it very easy to find a specialist when they needed one.

We received a number of questions from readers after the first Top Docs issue hit the street. Several of them didn't understand that we were referring to the area's doctors and physicians. They thought we were listing the top "docks" in the area and asked why we would create an issue about boat docks. Richmond might be on a river, but the issue was not about fishing.

Other local media spread the word about the issue, but it didn't always go as planned. A couple of radio stations

tried to interview several doctors about it, only to find out that they hadn't been chosen for the list. Some doctors didn't even know we'd done a survey. It made for very awkward interviews.

Our own efforts to share the news had unpredictable results, too. Several of the winning doctors were surprised and happy to be nominated. Then there were the docs who had tossed the survey, not knowing what we were trying to do, or who had forgotten to mail it back. Those tended to be the

same doctors who called or wrote letters asking why they weren't included in the tabulations. We always told them that we sent the ballot, but the rest was up to them.

As the years have gone by, the process has become much simpler. We still ask the vast network of area physicians to nominate their colleagues, but they get the request by email and the survey appears online.

All doctors need to do is click and type — although we still have to remind them to hit the final button to "return" the survey. And these days, the only calls we get are from doctors who appreciate the recognition and readers who love being able to look up their docs and find medical specialists every April in Richmond magazine.

Perhaps one day we will publish a Top "Docks" issue and ask area fishermen for their input. I suspect it would make for a very short story! ■

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LOCAL



Giff Breed, president of Pros Inc., hopes to revitalize The Crossings Golf Club.

JAY PAUL

What to know as the REAL ID deadline nears [P. 32](#)

Henrico's Mosquito Team targets pesky pests [P. 34](#)

Plans for a golf course's revival [P. 36](#)

Flashback: From country villa to the Science Museum [P. 40](#)

Edited by MARK NEWTON

GOVERNMENT

TIME TO GET REAL

Upgraded ID will be needed for domestic flights starting May 7

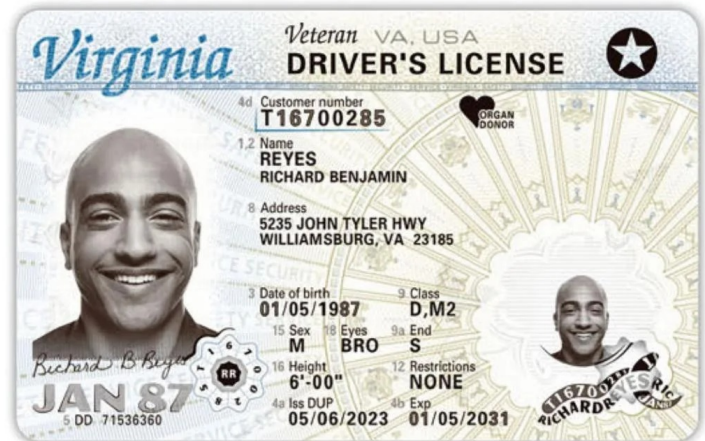
Those who have delayed getting a REAL ID — an upgraded version of a driver's license required by federal law — may still have their doubts. After all, the requirement that all American citizens have upgraded identity verification was signed by President George W. Bush on May 11, 2005. Nearly 20 years later, it still has not been fully implemented, leaving a slew of lapsed deadlines in its wake.

But according to a U.S. Transportation Security Administration announcement Jan. 13, that extended grace period is about to end. Beginning May 7, a driver's license or ID card with REAL ID will be required in all 50 states to board commercial flights, access military bases and enter federal facilities that require identification. Another form of federal identification, such as a passport, also will be accepted.

"With three months to go before the deadline," TSA Federal Security Director Sid Hanna said in February, "now is the time to make a plan for what you will use to verify your identity with TSA when traveling."

Virginia has been offering REAL ID-compliant driver's licenses, which have stronger security features (such as holograms) and document requirements than a regular license, since 2018.

An online or paper application with the DMV must be complemented with one proof of identity; two proofs of Virginia residency; one proof of legal presence; proof of Social Security



number; proof of name change, if applicable; and a \$10 surcharge, plus the cost of the license or ID card.

Proof of identity can include an official birth certificate, a passport, a U.S. Certificate of Citizenship or a U.S. Certificate of Naturalization. Two proofs of Virginia residency can include a valid Virginia driver's license, mortgage statements or lease agreements, or recent utility bills.

Despite the changes, a typical driver's license will still be sufficient for driving, voting, accessing health services and applying for and receiving federal benefits. —D. Hunter Reardon

VIBE CHECK



The Richmond Kickers have a new logo, designed by Alex Koch creative director at Easy Friday Company. The red, white and blue the soccer club's original 1993 colors and features an interlocking monogram with flowing legs meant to represent the falls of the James River. Kickeroo, the team's mascot, also got a matching makeover



723

Apartments to be built in the metro Richmond area through adaptive reuse projects, according to RentCafe. Of these, 300 will be created by repurposing offices within city limits. One project includes Petersburg's Virginia Trunk & Bag Co. Factory, which was first built in 1903 and is listed in the Virginia Landmarks Register. In 2021, the 13-building site was purchased by Waukeshaw Development for \$3 million.

\$9.39M

Size of the annual federal grant awarded in January to Homeward, the planning and coordinating agency for the Greater Richmond Continuum of Care. The money, which includes an increase of \$1.57 million in new project funds, is estimated to support permanent housing assistance for more than 1,500 regional residents.



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Ashley Falat, Henrico County Vector Surveillance and Control team intern

HEALTH

FIGHTING THE BITE

Henrico's Mosquito Team tracks pest populations to keep residents safe

By Rachel Kester

It's a mellow summer afternoon. The day is filled with radiant sunshine, a slight jasmine-scented breeze and, wait — is that the shrill of a mosquito?

Despite its small size, the dreaded insect can easily ruin summer reveries. They'll stalk victims until they're covered in itchy, irritating bites, some of which could transmit pathogens. It's why Henrico County has assembled a team to protect residents.

Made up of medical entomologists and those with other scientific and stormwater management backgrounds, the Department of Public Works' Vector Surveillance and Control group, also known as the Mosquito Team, spends April to about mid-November tracking, investigating and deterring these insects. Staff members also provide free mosquito inspections for county residents, and they give presentations to schools and other groups.

Though there are about 55 mosquito species in Henrico, there are two of

primary concern: Asian tiger and house. The former is considered more of a nuisance, but the latter is known for transmitting West Nile virus, causing a disease that can induce fever, nausea and body aches in most cases and potentially death in severe infections. It's a problem that tends to spike around August to the end of September.

Around 400 surveillance sites and 600 treatment sites are scattered across the county. These sections are determined based on population density and distance. "In more populous areas like the West End, we have monitoring sites potentially every few miles," says medical entomologist Wes Robertson, who is a county environmental and vector management specialist. "In more rural areas such as the East End, it tends to be more spread out."

But this all depends on numerous variables, as mosquito populations ebb and flow yearly. "A few years, numbers will be on the rise, and [some years] numbers peak out. [Other] years, they'll crash and, after the crash, the numbers will rise back up," Robertson says. It's a wild ride affected by aspects like drought and heat.

To thwart proliferation, various

methods are relied on, like spraying or hand-applying Bti, which is an eco-friendly granular larvicide made up of soil bacteria spores that naturally destroy mosquito larvae.

For adult mosquitoes, carbon dioxide and gravid traps are used. The first mimics a large organism breathing; it attracts mosquitoes who attempt to feed on it but find themselves instead

captured by its strong vacuum suction. Gravid traps specifically target females. Featuring a mixture of heavily polluted and smelly water, the trap simulates a desired egg-laying spot. The eggs are then collected and tested for pathogens.

Henrico's mosquito squad formed in the early 2000s after the West Nile virus began spreading throughout the U.S., including in western Henrico. It was a way to help handle resident concerns and eventually grew into a comprehensive surveillance program. Today, the team consists of three full-time staff members with several seasonal workers, all on a mission to safeguard and educate locals about the insects.

The team's success has led them to recently focus on other initiatives as well. In the past year, they've begun monitoring ticks for Lyme disease, as well as a pollinator program, something that could be key for fighting mosquitoes as some pollinators, like beetles, feed on them.

"Once biodiversity increases, we may have more natural control on pests," Robertson says. "It's another tool in the toolbox." ■

The Mosquito Team targets two of Henrico's most prevalent species:



Asian tiger mosquito (*Aedes albopictus*)



House mosquito (*Culex pipiens*)



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SPORTS

GREEN RENOVATION

Henrico County is giving The Crossings Golf Club a much-needed facelift

By D. Hunter Reardon

When Neal Sims was a junior at Hermitage High School in 1973, he would leave school at 11:30 a.m. and go to work at Half Sink Golf Course.

The start of his 41-year career with the course came as the 268-acre property in northern Henrico was going through a transition. Originally called Ethelwood Golf Course upon opening in 1960, its name changed to The Crossings Golf Club in 1979.

Located at the intersection of interstates 95 and 295, the course is ensconced behind thickets of evergreen trees and “has always been tucked away,” Sims says. “It’s always been a kind of secluded spot. The location is ideal.”

In the club’s heyday in the 1980s, Sims says, “We were a pristine, top-of-the-line

golf course.” To his disappointment, The Crossings entered a steep decline as the course changed hands several times and shed key employees. Its sale price dropped each time, plummeting from \$10 million in 2008 to \$1.75 million in 2016.

That same year, Sims, growing frustrated with constant turnover and a dwindling budget, chose to retire early as assistant superintendent, as did Superintendent Steve Snare, who had been at The Crossings for 37 years. Sims kept in contact with some of the team, and by 2024, he says, “nobody was really maintaining it. There was grass and weeds all in the bunkers. It was just a wreck.”

“The course was in really bad condition,” confirms Anthony Romanello, executive director of the Henrico Economic Development Authority.

But the course’s design, history and location made the site attractive to Henrico County

The Crossings Golf Club in northern Henrico County

when it went up for sale again. In August 2024, it was purchased by the Henrico EDA for approximately \$3 million.

Pros Inc., a sports and events marketing firm based in Midlothian, is leasing the site from Henrico and is spending \$11 million to redevelop the course. The goal is to reopen in 2026. Pros Inc. President Giff Breed, who also co-owns Independence Golf Course in Powhatan County, hopes his team can restore the once-renowned club, which is the only 18-hole public golf course in Henrico.

“The Crossings was a great golf course back in the day, and I think we can bring it back to its glory,” Breed says.

CHAMPIONSHIP-READY

The first conversations that Henrico officials had about purchasing The Crossings came following the 2023 cancellation of the Dominion Energy Charity Classic at the Country Club of Virginia, a PGA Tour Champions event hosted there since 2016.

The PGA Tour Champions series, formerly the Senior PGA Tour, is open to professional golfers ages 50 and over. Last year’s event at CCV featured top players such as Fred Couples, Ernie Els and

Phil Owenby, a member of the Virginia Golf Hall of Fame, is helping revive The Crossings Golf Club.





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< GREEN RENOVATION | CONT'D FROM P. 36

Bernhard Langer. Tiger Woods, one of the most famous golfers of all time, will turn 50 next year, making him eligible to compete in PGA Tour Champions events.

"Our plan is to host the PGA Tour Champions playoff event in October 2026, which happens to be Tiger Woods' first playoff event," Breed says. "Richmond would buzz if Mr. Woods was here, playing. So, we're trying our hardest to get this done in time."

Besides the economic activity generated by the tournament, Sims says the impact extends beyond one weekend in the fall.

"It will take The Crossings a few years to get its reputation back," he says. "But if they get the tournament, that will be a big deal. That will prove to people, 'Hey, the golf course is nice.'"

Besides the PGA Tour Champions, Henrico Sports & Entertainment Authority Executive Director Dennis Bickmeier says that his team will have its eye on all types of events once the course is up and running again.

"The Crossings was a great golf course back in the day, and I think we can bring it back to its glory."

—Giff Breed, Pros Inc. president

"We'll work with Richmond Region Tourism and other partners here in the area to bring events to The Crossings," Bickmeier says. "That could be a high school championship, a collegiate championship or other amateur championships."

Per the terms of the agreement with the Henrico EDA and Pros Inc., Henrico County Public Schools golf teams will have full access to the facility.

SEASONAL GROWTH

To make the course suitable for high-level players, it will be lengthened from its former total distance of approximately

6,600 yards to approximately 7,500 yards.

Legendary golf course architect Lester George, who has designed and redesigned several notable courses in Richmond — including CCV — was tabbed by Breed for the project. Golf industry leader Phil Owenby will serve as general manager, and local amateur golfer Vinny Giles is also assisting in the redevelopment.

"One thing I've heard those guys say is that the layout of the golf course, the bones of the golf course, are really good," Bickmeier says.

One aspect of The Crossings that won't change in 2026, however, is its access.

"Like Independence, it will be a 100% public course," Breed says. "There will still be memberships, but anybody can come and play."

Sims, for his part, is happy that his old stomping ground is once again in good hands.

"They've got big aspirations," he says. "Once they get it done, it's going to be a top-notch place." ■



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FLASHBACK

A Little Cottage

A country retreat made way for fairgrounds, a military encampment, an amusement park, a golf club and the Science Museum of Virginia

Col. John Mayo Jr., whose grandfather William laid out Richmond's original plans for city founder William Byrd II, acquired lands west of the small municipality along the James River in 1781. The property, with 1791 additions, encompassed an area bounded on the south by meandering Westham Road (Park Avenue), present-day Hermitage Road on the east, the Old Coal Pit Road (near Interstate 95) on the west and today's Bryan Park on the north.

Amid this 600-acre tract, Mayo established a country villa he dubbed "The Hermitage." The estate began as a small cottage that expanded with rambling additions and reflected his family's growth alongside his wife, Abigail DeHart.

Mayo's deliberate commute from his city house and business to a country home went against the usual practice of Richmond's thrifty merchants, who preferred living near their work. Mayo represented a generational shift with the upper class and possessed the means to escape the muddy and smelly cluster of town. His revenue stream in part derived from the operation of the Mayo's Toll Bridge (today the 14th St. Bridge). Mayo went on to represent Henrico County in the General Assembly, sit as a member of the Council of State in 1798 and serve during the War of 1812 as a lieutenant colonel of the 33rd Virginia Regiment.

Historian Samuel Mordecai refers to The Hermitage "as anything but a ... point of seclusion; for there [first child Maria Mayo,] the reigning belle of the day, as well



as other members of the family, attracted many visitors," including suitors, whom Maria repeatedly refused, even a young military up-and-comer, Winfield Scott.

Industrialization and expansion chipped away at the Hermitage's bucolic character. Prosperous coal mining in Goochland and Henrico counties caused the creation of the 1804 Richmond Turnpike, which cut across the lower portion of the Mayo land.

Mayo, perhaps thinking the much-added-on house no longer suited his elevated niche, bought the nearby Alexander Parris-designed Bellville estate, the building and furnishing of which had financially ruined owner John Bell. There, Maria finally agreed to marry Scott, who had become a hero in the War of 1812.

Mayo sold off pieces of The Hermitage property, though the house remained. "It is possible that Mayo used the house for quarters for his extensive slave holdings," reflects National Park Service historian Mike Gorman in a monograph, "or that Mayo's wife Abigail continued to use

The Hermitage was a 600-acre country villa for Col. John Mayo Jr. and his wife, Abigail DeHart.

the house after John's death in 1818. Whatever the uses, by 1835 the house was no longer a rural retreat," since by then tracks for the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad cut through the upper portion.

After Abigail died in 1843, The Hermitage stood derelict. It burned to the ground in 1857, but the estate's dependencies — the kitchen, laundry, slave quarters and stables — were still standing when in 1859 the Virginia Central Agricultural Society purchased 50 acres of The Hermitage's lands. The version of the state fair held there sought a larger and more accommodating situation than at its Monroe Park location.

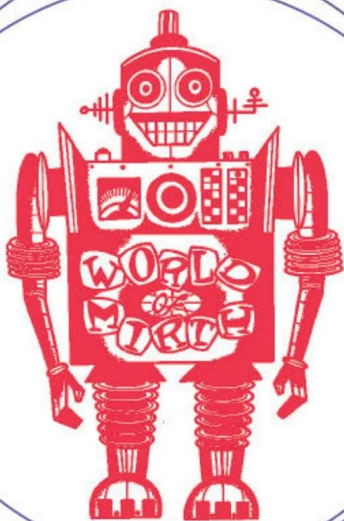
This site of revelry gave way to other public displays. The increasing divisions in the country caused the 1860 transformation of the grounds into Camp Lee, named for Revolutionary War champion Henry "Light-Horse Harry" Lee, the father of Robert E. Lee. The encampment attracted considerable attention, and newspapers reported special trains for visiting civilians and ladies promenading in the exhibition hall to watch the martial drills and displays.

Camp Lee over time turned into a busy rear echelon military facility for the organization and training of Confederate troops. The sudden gathering of 5,000 >





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< A LITTLE COTTAGE | CONT'D FROM P. 40

men amid unsanitary conditions gave rise to the city's first military hospital, which initially occupied the fair's former exhibition and horticulture halls. Some 40 structures went up, none of them durable; only The Hermitage's outbuildings survived. After the implementation of a compulsory draft, Camp Lee became a receiving center for conscripts and paroled prisoners and a place of execution for spies and deserters.

Following Richmond's occupation, it became the headquarters and hospital for the Union's XXIV Corps. Along with the thousands of men in blue came destitute refugees and among them former slaves, now free. They were housed in a crescent of 20 slapdash cabins named "Goree." The Freedman's Bureau set up schools at Camp Lee for assisting hundreds of Black people in their transition from bondage to freedom.

By 1867, another transition remade Camp Lee into an entertainment resort with a horse track, beer garden, gaming

The Hermitage Golf Club moved from the area of its historical namesake in 1916 to where it exists today.

parlor and pavilions for private parties. The "Goree" section remained, as did some of The Hermitage's structures. However, all these amenities disappeared when the fair returned.

After the turn of the century, a group of golf enthusiasts honored the antecedents of the location by naming their organization the Hermitage Golf Club, entering into a lease with Richmond Traction Co. for the property at the elbow of Hermitage Road and West Broad Street. In 1913, the RF&P railroad informed the club of a plan to build a major station on the property; the



organization moved to Hilliard Road in 1916 as the Hermitage Country Club.

The great domed John Russell Pope Union or Broad Street Station, after varying delays, opened on Jan. 6, 1919, and became the region's busiest rail center until the 1950s.

Amtrak closed its urban stations nationally and the last train left Broad Street on Nov. 15, 1975. The state, which owned the property and had little interest in maintaining the edifice, wanted to raze the station for office space.

Then came Roscoe Hughes, the head of the Virginia Academy of Sciences who, following a long and complicated statewide campaign, opened a nascent science museum in the former "Colored Waiting Room" of the station on Jan. 6, 1977. The 1970s recession helped in its way to save the building, creating the Science Museum of Virginia. **R**

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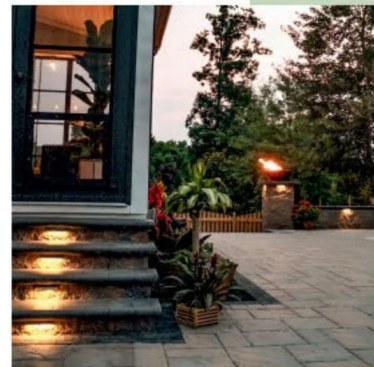
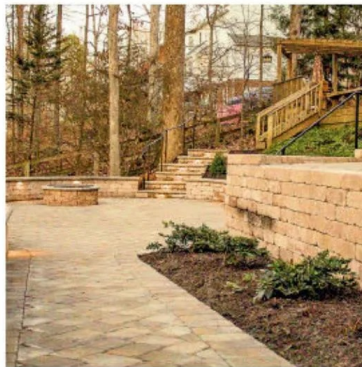


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Frida on White Bench, New York (detail), 1939, Nickolas Muray (American, born Hungary, 1892–1965), carbon pigment print. Private Collection © Nickolas Muray Photo Archives. Licensed by Nickolas Muray Photo Archives

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P. 52

Edited by NICOLE COHEN

Datebook



POETRY

RHYME TIME

The Richmond Poetry Fest is back for its third year at the Visual Arts Center of Richmond, featuring poetry readings, activities and vendors in celebration of National Poetry Month and the prolific local writing community. This year's special events include a performance by poet and musician JJJJerome Ellis — who puts a spotlight on the stuttering community — Drag Poetry Story Hour with Michelle Livigne and a poetry slam show with The Writer's Den (\$20 to compete). Writers of all ages and experience levels (there will be age-specific events) are invited to join in this free celebration of Richmond poetry. The festival runs from 6 to 11 p.m. on April 11 and 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. on April 12, with free workshops in the days leading up to the event. visarts.org —*Melody Yuan*

ART

ALL THE TRIMMINGS

Expect the unexpected during Richmond Fringe, a three-day festival showcasing experimental performance art, April 12-14. This year's lineup offers 17 events, including interactive games, after-parties, an immersive art truck and an award-winning play, "The Mockingbird News," featuring improvisational jazz. "We celebrate the intersection of art, the cross-pollination of people and a festival atmosphere for brave, curious audiences," says organizer and creative producer Carmel Clavin. This year's host venues include Révéler, Gold Lion Community Cafe, Fall-out, Shafer Street Playhouse and one secret to-be-disclosed location. Admission per event ranges from free to \$25. richmondfringe.com —*Laura Anders Lee*



SPORTS

RUN WITH IT

Whether you're a seasoned runner or a casual walker, the Ukrop's Monument Avenue 10K, April 12, offers something for everyone. The event features a 6.2-mile course, live entertainment and a vibrant atmosphere. "The spectators really bring the energy no matter what time you are on the course," says Nan Callahan, spokesperson for event organizer Sports Backers. Callahan says to expect an uptick in spirit groups and porch parties along the route. Registration for the in-person and virtual race options starts at \$65 for adults and \$55 for youth. The Atlantic Union Bank 10K Mini Kids Run offers in-person and virtual race options starting at \$45. The post-race festival is free to attend. sportsbackers.org —*Nati Feliciano-Soto*

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: COURTESY VISUAL ARTS CENTER OF RICHMOND; COURTESY SPORTS BACKERS; ISAAC HARRELL

ART

'BEYOND THE MYTH'

Frida Kahlo is an iconic 20th-century artist who established an unmistakable personal style. A new exhibition coming to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts transcends the Mexican creative's recognizable floral headpieces and fringed shawls by exploring "Frida: Beyond the Myth." Opening at the museum April 5 and continuing through Sept. 28, the showcase features more than 60 pieces, including some of Kahlo's most notable paintings, many rarely seen outside of Mexico. Photographs of Kahlo are also on display, captured by those who were closest to her. Companion programming includes FridaFest on April 5, a discussion with author Hayden Herrera on April 25, a screening of the film "Frida" on April 26 and additional events. Tickets to the exhibition, presented in the VMFA's Altria and NewMarket Galleries, are \$10 to \$20. vmfa.museum —Nicole Cohen



EVENT

TAKE A SPIN

The 17th edition of Record Store Day, hosted worldwide on April 12, celebrates music at independent retail outlets, whether flowing out of the rainbow spectrum, reflected on vinyl or realized in other formats. Jim Bland of the venerable Plan 9 Music in Carytown says he thinks the store was the first in the region to join Record Store Day. "Artists will release singles specifically timed for this date," he says. There's a combination of new and old: Taylor Swift is scheduled to release a 7-inch vinyl single, and there'll be a limited edition Grateful Dead box set and plenty of jazz reissues. "Really, every kind of music gets some attention," Bland says. At Plan 9, stop, look and listen for DJs during the day, plus in-store performances. recordstoreday.com, plan9music.com —Harry Kollatz Jr.



FILM

DRAWING ATTENTION

The third annual Richmond Animation Festival returns to The Byrd Theatre April 27, featuring a screening of shorts by artists from around the world at 5:30 p.m. and a showcase of work by Los Angeles-based artist Lilli Carré at 7 p.m. Co-organizer and animator Jordan Bruner explains that Richmond is home to film events and festivals, but none are dedicated to animation. "It's an opportunity for us to watch the work of some of our favorite artists on the big screen at The Byrd, and invite others to watch them with us," she says. Tickets are \$15. byrdtheatre.org —HK

SPECIAL EVENTS

HOP TO IT

The Easter Bunny is coming to town April 20. For some fun with a bun, check out Maymont's annual holiday event, a Spring Fling at a Hanover farm and more.

APRIL 12

Enjoy some Eggstreme Easter Fun at Stony Point Fashion Park. This free event is hosted at the shopping center from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. and features balloon art, face painting, crafts and a petting zoo. The Children's Entrepreneur Market offers goods from kid-run businesses. Snag a photo with the Easter Bunny, who will be roaming the spring celebration. shopstonypoint.com

APRIL 12-13 AND 19-20

Pactamere Farm in Hanover County is hosting a 2025 Spring Fling with Easter egg hunts, crafts, and photo ops with the resident baby goats, chicks and rabbits as well as the Easter Bunny. On two weekends from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily, participants can enjoy goat playtime, a petting zoo, a bounce house, lawn games and more. The Easter egg hunt is ongoing each day, so kids 11 and under can participate any time between 10:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. Admission is \$15 (\$20 with egg hunt added). goatyogarva.com

APRIL 19

Bonnet-making, goat feedings, a jump rope team exhibition, and an Easter Bunny meet and greet are just a few of the entertainment options at this year's Dominion Energy Family Easter at Maymont. Hosted on the Carriage House Lawn from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., the event features games, crafts, live music and food vendors. Explore the grounds, including the Maymont Farm and The Robins Nature Center, then spread out your picnic blanket and relax with tunes and treats. Tickets are \$5. maymont.org

APRIL 20

After some funding concerns earlier this year, Easter on Parade has secured a new sponsor and will return to Monument Avenue on Easter Sunday. This annual walking parade, hosted by Historic Monument Avenue, encourages participants to don their frilliest bonnets —

furry friends included — and promenade along the street between North Allen and Davis avenues. Plus, live music, vendors and more make this event a hoppin' party. 1 to 5 p.m. Free. monumentavenue.org/blog



—Compiled by NC



FASHION

URBAN THREADS

RVA Fashion Week returns to Richmond's runways April 21-27, bringing avant-garde couture and streetwear styles along with it. For the 17th year of the event, the programming will spotlight a range of talents, from the region's rising stars to standout designers from across the East Coast, all coordinated by RVA Fashion Week's new management team. There will be four shows hosted throughout the week, including one highlighting urban streetwear and the creativity and cultural influence of street fashion. "It's a celebration of self-expression, blending high fashion with everyday wear in a way that truly reflects today's fashion landscape," says Aliyah Coley, fashion operation manager of RVA Fashion Week. Tickets start at \$15 for general admission and \$150 for VIP. rvafw.com —Mary Margaret Clouse

Happenings



MUSIC

4/10

A folk supergroup of bass singers, The Wellermen bring their Northern Sky U.S. Tour to The Tin Pan at 8 p.m. \$35. tinpanrva.com

4/10-12

Richmond-based thrash powerhouse band Municipal Waste celebrate their 25th anniversary with The Waste Spring Kickback event, featuring a local lineup of shows at Cobra Cabana (April 10, 7 p.m., \$17), The Broadberry (sold out) and The National (April 12, 7 p.m., \$38.50). municipalwaste.net

4/13

Known for their hit song "Sail," AWOLNATION plays The National at 7:30 p.m. \$35. thenationalva.com

4/26

After the 2024 release of her new album, "Big Ideas," indie pop artist Remi Wolf performs at Brown's Island at 7:30 p.m. Tickets start at \$49.50. thebroadberry.com

5/3

The 14th Richmond Bluegrass Jam features nearly 20 Americana bands on multiple stages. The event raises funds for Richmond Fisher House and Liberation Veteran Services, which provide assistance to veterans and their families. The festival runs 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. at the American Legion Post 354 in Midlothian. Admission is free. rvbluegrassjam.com

STAGE

4/4-13

Firehouse Theatre partners with the Virginia War Memorial Foundation to present "War in Pieces," four one-act plays by Virginia veterans. The performances will be hosted at the Virginia War Memorial's VMI Alumni Hall. \$15 to \$35. firehousetheatre.org

4/15-20

Broadway in Richmond brings "A Beautiful Noise," the untold true story of Neil Diamond's rise to fame, to the Altria Theater. Tickets start at \$38.50. altriatheater.com

4/17-20

Performers at the University of Richmond's Modlin Center for the Arts present the musical satire "Urinetown." Free. modlin.richmond.edu

THROUGH 4/27

Witness a thrilling mystery unfold with Virginia Repertory Theatre's production of "Dial M for Murder," performed at Hanover Tavern. \$54. va-rep.org

GALLERIES

5/2-6/14

"The Bathers," a group photography exhibition, is on view at Candela Books + Gallery. candelagallery.com

THROUGH 5/4

Crossroads Art Center showcases a juried all-media exhibition, "All That Jazz," featuring works that

celebrate jazz culture. crossroadsartcenter.com

EXHIBITIONS

4/11-5/11

The 2025 VCUarts Master of Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition is presented at the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University. icavcu.org

THROUGH 9/1

"Edmund Archer: Perspectives on Black Dignity" at the Valentine showcases portraits of Black men and women that contrast the offensive stereotypes and caricatures of 20th-century pop culture. Included with museum admission (\$12). thevalentine.org



THROUGH 1/4/2026

The Virginia Museum of History & Culture highlights the commonwealth's role in the American Revolution during "Give Me Liberty: Virginia & the Forging of a Nation." Included with museum admission (\$8 to \$12). virginiahistory.org

EVENTS

4/11-13

The Bizarre Bazaar's 33rd annual Spring Market is packed with vendors offering gifts, art, home decor, crafts and more. The event is hosted at the Richmond Raceway Complex, and admission is \$9. thebizarrebazaar.com

4/12

James River Cellars Winery offers live music, wine and local vendors during its April Fools Festival from noon to 5 p.m. \$20 online, \$25 at the gate. jamesrivercellars.com



4/25-27

The Treasures of the Earth Gem, Mineral and Jewelry Show stops at the Richmond Raceway Complex from noon to 6 p.m. on April 25 and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. April 26-27. \$8. treasuresoftheearth.com

4/26

Maymont welcomes spring with the annual Herbs Galore plant sale from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. on the Carriage House Lawn. Admission is \$10. maymont.org

4/26

For the 21st year, Ashland Train Day celebrates the railroad history of the town with locomotives, model trains, a showcase of trucks and tractors, and more along the railroad tracks in Downtown Ashland. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is free. ashlandvirginia.com/trainday

4/26-27

Rest Fest combines wellness activities with alcohol-free entertainment, including drinks from Point 5 and CaryTown Teas, plus yoga, items from local artisans, and music from Big Fancy and Holy River at The Cardinal Weddings & Events in Moseley. 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tickets start at \$99. rvarestfest.com

5/3

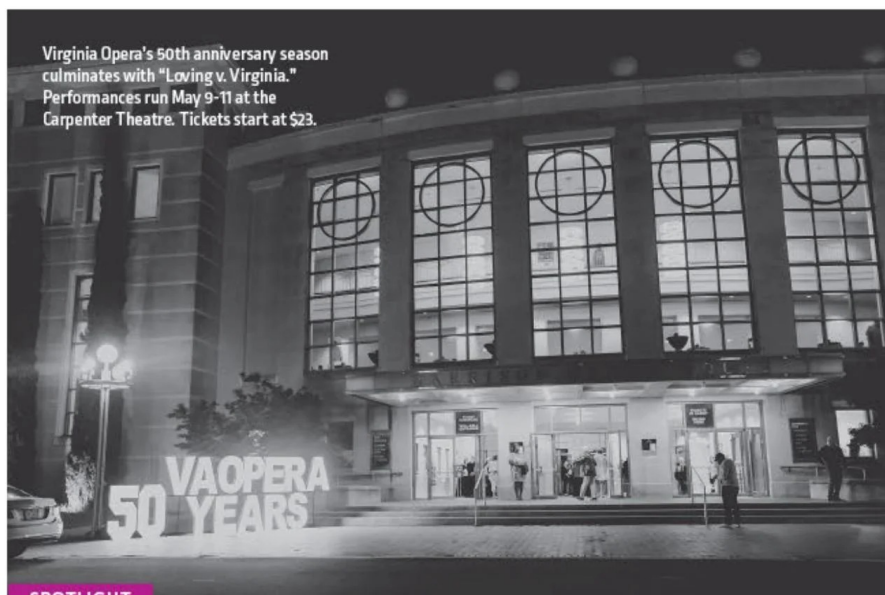
The ¿Qué Pasa? Festival celebrates Hispanic and Latin American cultures at Brown's Island from noon to 8 p.m. Admission is free. quepasafestival.com

5/3-4

Arts in the Park features more than 350 artists offering art, jewelry and more for view and purchase at The Carillon in Byrd Park. 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. May 3 and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. May 4. Admission is free. richmondartsinthepark.com

—Compiled by Gray Pershing

Virginia Opera's 50th anniversary season culminates with "Loving v. Virginia." Performances run May 9-11 at the Carpenter Theatre. Tickets start at \$23.



LOVE SONG

Virginia Opera celebrates 50 years with the world premiere of 'Loving v. Virginia'

By Joan Tupponce

The story of Richard and Mildred Loving — an interracial couple whose marriage was not recognized in Virginia until a landmark 1967 Supreme Court ruling — is the focus for a new production from Virginia Opera. The culminating performances of the opera's 50th anniversary season, "Loving v. Virginia" — produced in collaboration with the Richmond Symphony — serves as a thematic trifecta for the organization: It is a Virginia story with music by a Virginia composer and a cast that includes Virginia talent, all punctuating the opera's commitment to presenting stories of historical and cultural significance.

"We were overdue for a new opera," says Adam Turner, Virginia Opera's artistic director and chief conductor, noting the company's most recent new work was in 2011. "We thought the company's 50th anniversary would be the

perfect moment."

The organization's desire to find a historically relevant Virginia-based narrative drew the company to the story of the Lovings. Though the couple married in 1958 in Washington, D.C., their union



Richard and Mildred Loving

was not recognized in their home state. They faced persecution and even time in prison prior to their history-making court case in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states could not ban interracial marriages. Their experiences were also the focus of the 2016 film "Loving."

"The story has a lot of profound meaning," Turner says. "It was crying out for operatic treatment."

Virginia-born composer Damien Geter and librettist Jessica Murphy Moo were brought in to collaborate on the words and music.

Murphy Moo found herself attracted to the project. "I feel a personal debt to

this principled couple," she says, noting she is also in an interracial marriage.

She traveled to Virginia to conduct research and get closer to the Lovings' story. Her visits included a local historian, the jail where the couple was arrested, the Library of Virginia, the Rappahannock County archives and the Caroline County Courthouse. She also met with Philip Hirschkop, one of the lawyers who represented the Lovings in the landmark case.

When Geter and Murphy Moo were brainstorming the themes of the new opera, Murphy Moo realized the law was the conflict in the story. "So, we made that a character — a law chorus that has a particular sound," she says. "We also talked about the idea of home."

Virginia Opera partnered with the Minnesota Opera to create the set and costumes for the production.

"We also brought in world-renowned mezzo-soprano Denyce Graves, who was raised in Washington, D.C., to serve as the stage director," Turner says. "She has been helping us conceive the look [of the show]."

While much of the Lovings' story is documented through public records, the opera had to imagine and bring to life the personal moments between the couple.

"Opera can afford a performer the opportunity to express inner thoughts through song and performance," Turner says. "We try to make it as realistic as possible while honoring the integrity of the Lovings and the spirit of optimism and perseverance they exhibited in the 1960s."

The Richmond Symphony, which is co-commissioning the world premiere, is also passionate about telling Virginia stories. "We were honored to be asked to partner with the opera," says Lacey Huszcza, the symphony's president and CEO.

One of the aspects that intrigued Huszcza about the Lovings was their quiet nature. "They were not trying to be civil rights activists," she says. "What they wanted was to live together and raise their family in Virginia. To have to step out of that comfort zone to make things right is always going to be a relevant story." ■

Expand your idea of what life was like then. *And of what a museum can be now.*

In the 18th century, global connections shaped daily life in unexpected ways. One artifact that tells this story is a 17th-century copper watering can made in Britain or the Netherlands. X-ray imaging revealed its geometric surface decoration created with punched or raised dots. This piece is the earliest metal archaeological example of the form found in America and one of few intact examples from the early colonial period. Its journey across oceans to reach colonial America mirrors the global exchange of goods and ideas that defined the era.

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SPOTLIGHT

SATELLITE ROCK

Rehearsal and jam session venue Orbital Music Park launches a new space

By Allison Kinney



I don't know where Godzilla is now, I think it's in the storage locker," says Tom Illmensee, co-founder of Orbital Music Park.

He and his longtime musical collaborator Morgan Huff started OMP as a place where Richmond musicians could gather and host intimate performances. He refers to a small plastic Godzilla figurine that guarded the front desk of the former OMP site, located in a still-operating industrial warehouse near the Sauer's Gardens neighborhood of Richmond from 2019 until 2022 (two years prior, it launched as a pop-up experience at city venues). The establishment offered rehearsal rooms for local music makers, a feature that will return when OMP opens a new space in Jackson Ward this summer.

"We think there are about 35,000 adult music makers in Richmond, and there are almost 100,000 apartments

where you can't make a sound," Illmensee notes. "So, they need a place to go."

The former hybrid practice and performance space served more than 600 members.

"That was our first prototype of what this could be," Illmensee explains, "and we outgrew it."

The search for a new space — with AC, plumbing and a more accessible location — led OMP to Révéler, a Carytown music and event venue with an ambiance a bit like someone installed a bar and stage inside a magician's walk-in closet.

"Révéler is kind of the music venue we always dreamed of having," Illmensee says. OMP currently hosts nightly jams and performances there. But while he sings its praises, he notes the building would have required major renovations to accommodate the addi-

Jazz musicians Weldon Hill, Victor Haskins, Steve Wilson and James "Saxsmo" Gates gather during a 2024 performance at Révéler.

tion of rehearsal spaces.

Illmensee secured two investors with a building ready to house the project; the new OMP site will occupy the rear of 210 W. Marshall St. "We'll have a back-alley entrance, like a speakeasy," he says. Members will enter via the Lunar Lounge, which is a library of books and instruments. Down a hallway will be two stage-sized practice rooms, suitable for a full band, modeled after the original space. New to this location will be two smaller rooms for individual practice and music lessons. Illmensee calls it "a radical refinement of the last space" that will serve a greater diversity of uses.

Two key features make the upcoming venue unique among local rehearsal options. Each room will be equipped with a full array of amplification devices with instruments available. This enables music makers to use heavy and expensive equipment they may not own or be able to haul around. It's also a site designed for gatherings.

"Our invitation is for the whole rainbow of Richmond to be in the space and making music," Illmensee says. "We really need to do our best to create a community space that feels safe and inclusive."

With the Jackson Ward venue focusing on practice sessions, OMP will remain in operation out of Révéler for its performance offerings. On April 15, Americana

musician Caroline Vain takes the stage (tickets are \$15), and on May 23, jazz group the Peter Bernstein + Mike Hawkins Trio perform (tickets are \$25). For more upcoming Révéler shows, visit revelerexperiences.com.

On April 5, OMP will present a TEDx talk at Virginia Commonwealth University, where they will discuss their strategies "to get people out of the audience and onto the stage." The event will be livestreamed for the general public (vcu.campusgroups.com/tedxvcu).

Looking towards a long-term goal, Illmensee says, "Our big plan is to build music parks in lots of zip codes all over the country and all over the world." **R**

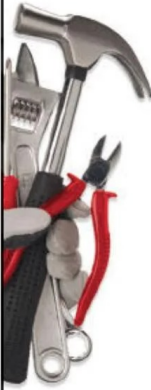
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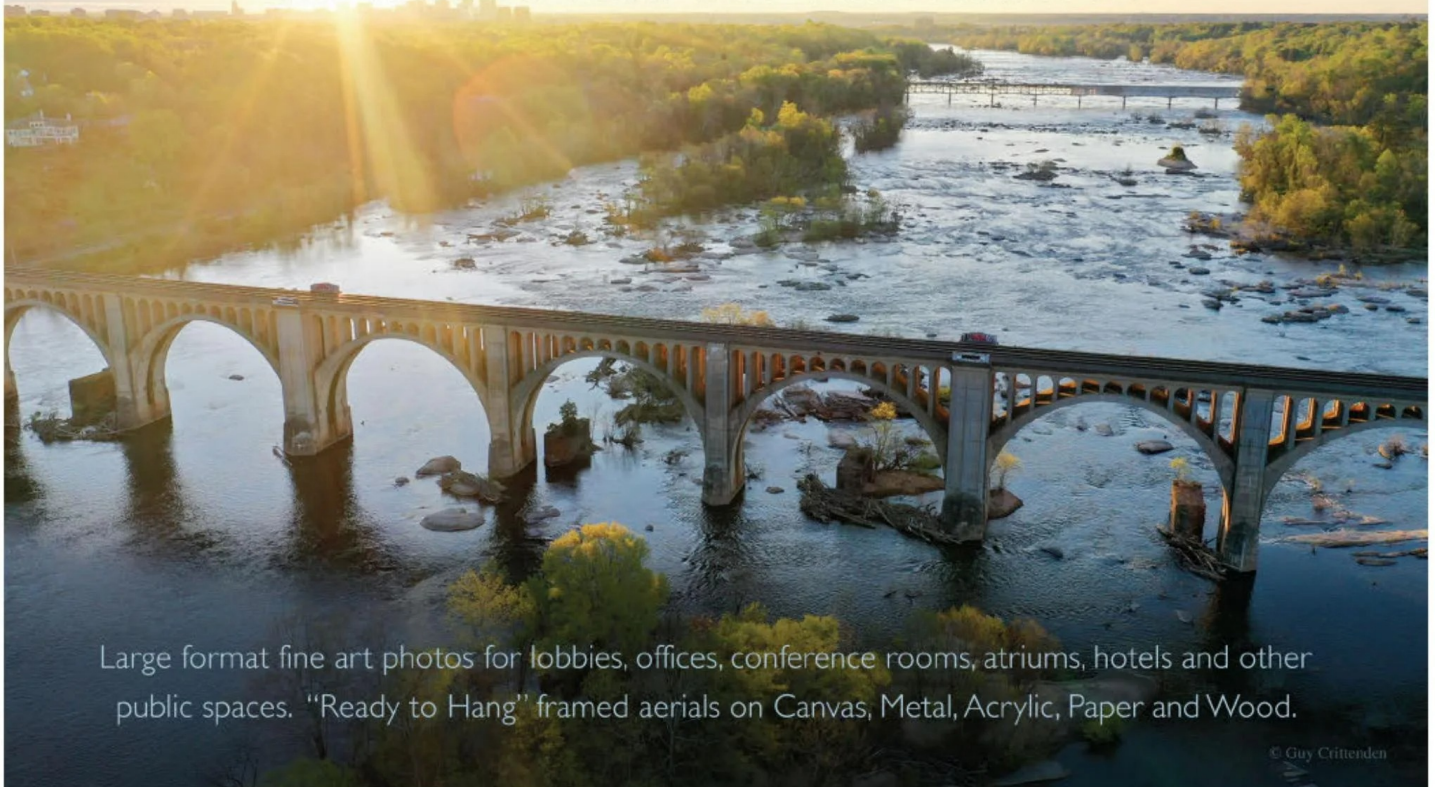
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LIVING



TOM HENNESSY

New boxes for local jewelers [P. 56](#)

A new base for The Virginia Home [P. 58](#)

The city's official flower is in bloom [P. 60](#)

Appalachian culture and cuisine in Abingdon [P. 62](#)

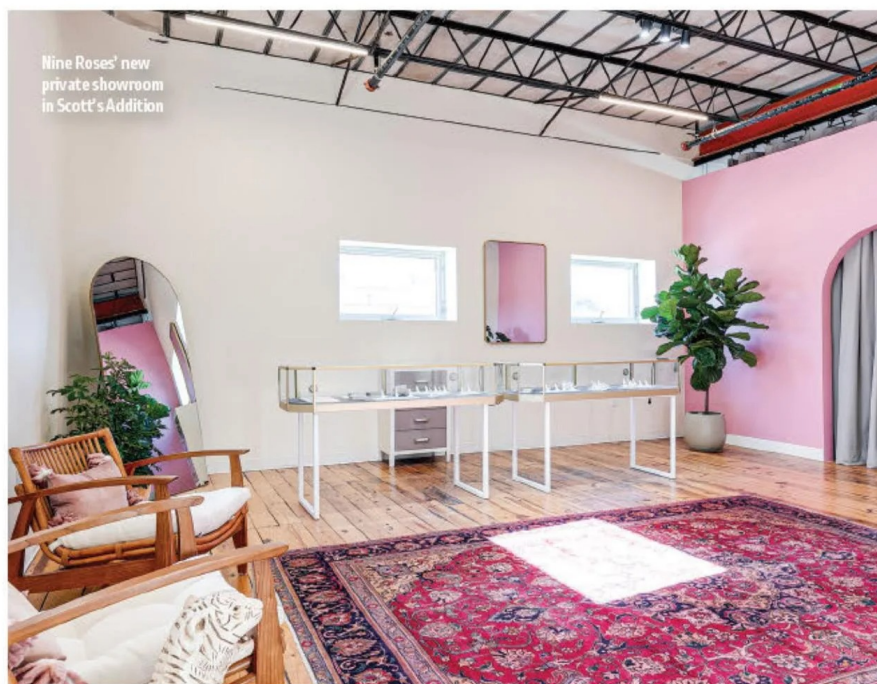
Edited by KEVIN JOHNSON

SHOP TALK

SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW

Ten years in, a fine jewelry maker is still updating its approach

By Joyelle Ronan



When Nine Roses moved to its new storefront at 3300 W. Broad St. last November, the brand planned for a different, more intimate jewelry shopping experience from its last location. Instead of hosting public shopping hours, owners Eliza and Nick DeRosa shifted their business model to a private showroom where they work with clients during one-on-one appointments. "There's a more thoughtful, informed consumer who's been driving [this model of shopping] for years, and they don't want to feel rushed or pressured," Nick says. "Because it's a big investment, and you want to make the right pick."

The duo started the brand 10 years ago this month from a storefront on Belmont Avenue in the Museum District. Nine Roses initially sold a mixture of original work and other jewelry brands, with

Nick at first making the original pieces in-house. As the business expanded, the production side moved to a studio in New York while the retail side remained in Richmond. To stay in business for a decade, the brand has undergone a few location changes around town and variations in its designs, though the DeRosas have maintained their passion for crafting modern heirlooms. "There are certain things that are just classic, and they can't really go tired," Nick says.

When it comes to setting the tone for potential clients, Nick draws satisfaction from representing a customer's personal taste in a piece and hopes the new brick-and-mortar space amplifies that feeling. "Whether it's a financial thought or the thought of the design, there's a lot that goes into it," he says. "So, it's nice to just have a really private, peaceful, chill place to hang out and talk about it." Clients can make appointments at ninerosesjewelers.com. **IR**

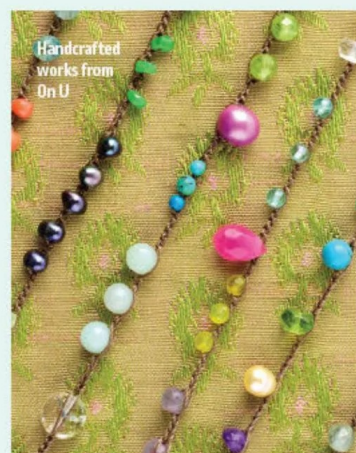
A COTTAGE CONTINUATION

The West End's On U migrates to a dual studio and retail space

By Melody Yuan

On U, the Richmond jewelry brand and Grove Avenue staple, has moved to a new studio space in the West End—a cottage, to be exact. After seven years at her studio and storefront on Grove Avenue, owner Donna Silvestri moved the brand into an intimate workshop at 7008 W. Franklin St. near The Village shopping center. The brand's handmade necklaces, bracelets and earrings are inspired in part by Silvestri's travels, where she acquires many of the antiques worked into the pieces.

In the new space, Silvestri plans to offer classes for jewelry making and basket weaving, her newest hobby. The studio displays premade designs and also offers custom pieces based on clients' unique interests. "I love being able to do special orders for people; it makes it more special [to them]," Silvestri says. Customers can shop in the new studio by appointment or at onujewelry.com.



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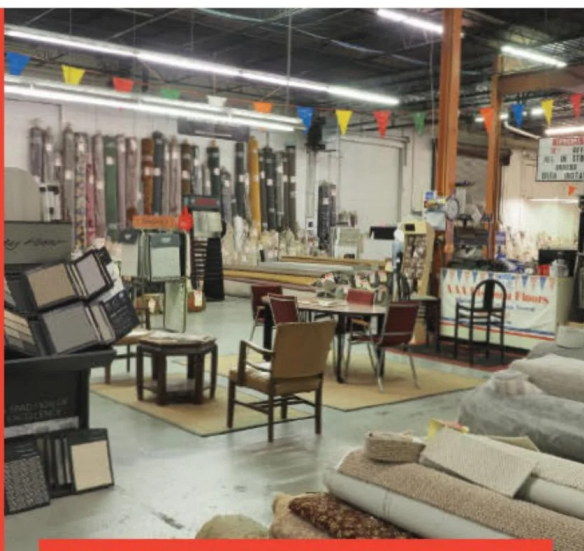
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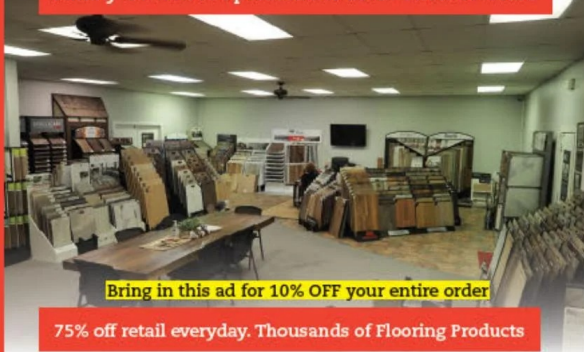
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A rendering of the new Virginia Home facility in Hanover County



GIVING BACK

The current Virginia Home in the Maymont neighborhood



WELCOME HOME

One of the city's oldest disability nonprofits builds a new base in Hanover County

By Kevin Johnson

There's no place like home; one of Richmond's oldest nonprofits knows that well. The Virginia Home has been caring for people with disabilities from its six-story building at 1101 Hampton St. near Byrd Park for just shy of a century. In recent years, leaders of the organization — which provides 24/7 care to 130 residents — sought a new space tailor-made for current and future residents and an expansion of services. Earlier this year, they found what they were looking for.

The Virginia Home's new destination is a 70-acre campus in Hanover County off Bell Creek Road, which will feature a 196,000-square-foot building meant to increase resident capacity by more than 20%. Doug Vaughan, president and CEO of the nonprofit since 2021, estimates the residents will be fully moved in by fall 2027.

"The new campus will address some issues we've had at our current location," Vaughan says. "We felt like transitioning

to a single-story modern design would enhance our resident safety, their accessibility and ease of movement throughout the building, and overall let us accomplish a lot that a renovation of the current building couldn't accommodate."

Additionally, architectural upgrades to resident rooms and bathrooms will be a primary focus for the new building, with plans to add roughly 100 square feet per room and introduce semiprivate bathrooms, which is a change from the shared hall bathrooms in the current facility.

Residents and staff, many of whom have worked and lived in the building for decades, share their excitement at being included in the plans for the new facility. "It's designed specifically for us," says Cyndi Carter, a resident at 1101 Hampton living with multiple sclerosis. "It's just beautiful."

The future-thinking move isn't just about improvements — it's about additions, says Laura Stewart, the nonprofit's board chair. Their goals include expand-

ing to 160 full-time residents and opening a day program meant to improve the quantity and quality of care for people with disabilities in the region. The organization's waitlist for residency openings has grown in recent years.

"It's the kind of thing where there's definitely a need, and I don't know that locally there's a supply to meet the demand," Stewart says.

While the home's prime location in the Maymont neighborhood was hard to give up, Stewart, Vaughan and others with the organization look forward to the positive impact the move can offer residents and the evolving nonprofit.

"It's a great spot with tons of room and nature around it, and there's lots happening in Hanover, too," Stewart says. "This building [in Richmond] has been very good to us. It will be hard to say goodbye to this building, but our new building is an opportunity to better serve our current residents and staff." ■

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LIFESTYLE

PETAL PRIDE

Richmond's official yet little-known flower is back in bloom

By Rachel Kester

With glorious colors, varying heights and distinct fragrances, irises are a garden staple for many. But in Richmond, the flower plays an additional, if somewhat obscure, role.

For over a century, the iris has served as Richmond's official city flower. The elegant emblem can be found in front gardens, the James River watershed and public areas, including Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden.

The garden's extensive iris collection goes back to the early 1990s and has been growing ever since. "We've been slowly adding to them," says Nikki Clare, assistant horticulturist at Lewis Ginter. "[The] Louisiana irises we just brought on board last year."

These can be found around the property's Reflection Pond, alongside numerous others adorning the grounds, such as classic bearded irises and dwarf crested irises, which are one of Clare's favorites. "It's a small purple bloom [and has] a really pretty little white face in the middle," she says.

Named after the Greek goddess of rainbows, the iris began its journey to Richmond renown in 1920, when City Council decided to declare an official flower.

With assistance from the James River Garden Club, they sought a bloom with specific traits, such as its appearance in a pot, its ability to fit in the mayor's buttonhole for state occasions, its exterior hardiness and its originality — and it could not be a flower claimed by any other U.S. city.

Locals submitted ballots through *The Richmond News Leader*. The public's winner, the rose, didn't quite meet the condition of hardiness. After some debate, the club's iris proposal was accepted, with the newspaper applauding the choice as a "rainbow flower" and "distinctive."

In April 1921, City Council enshrined the iris in Richmond city code. The club soon got to work promoting the flower, sponsoring an iris exhibit and flower show the next month and planting irises around St. John's Church, Monument Avenue and Monroe Park. The city seal even featured a ring of irises before its design was changed in 1968.

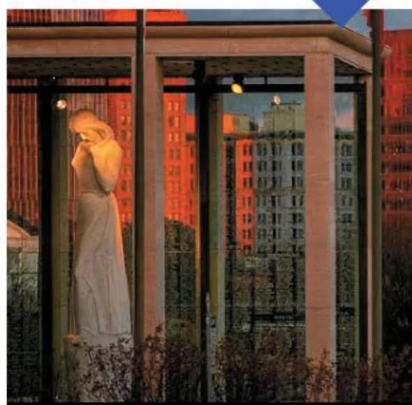
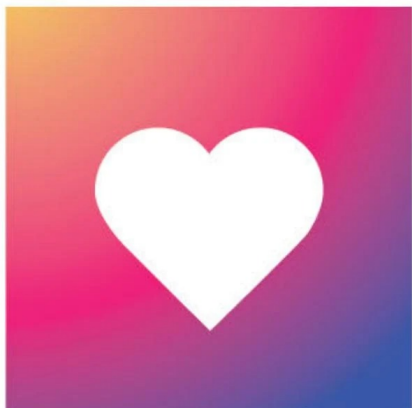
Richmond's irises typically awaken in

April and stay on display until mid-June. Some, like reblooming irises, might dazzle once more in late summer and even into early fall if conditions are right.

The flower works both in large gardens and small containers and offers an array of hues and styles. "Irises come in about every color except true red," says Wayne Bryant, president of the Central Virginia Iris Society. "Newer varieties of bearded irises tend to have more ruffling and are very attractive."

The iris is a uniquely generous perennial; as it grows, the plant produces increasing rhizomes (underground stems), which eventually become new irises. All gardeners have to do is dig them up and divide them. "It's kind of like a free, forever growing plant if you do that little bit of maintenance," Clare says.

On May 4, CVIS will host an iris show and sale at Lewis Ginter. "This is a great opportunity to see many types and colors of irises in one place and to start or add to your collection," Bryant says. To show your RVA pride in subtle-yet-stunning fashion this spring, he suggests "[letting] your iris obsession thrive." ■



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TRAVEL

A SLICE OF SOUTHWESTERN LIFE

Abingdon's culture scene may top its trails *By Kari Smith*



The town known as the gateway to the Virginia Creeper Trail — a rollicking path featuring 34 miles of biking and hiking trails — has developed a second act. Its visual and culinary arts may now best outdoor adventure as the town's defining features.

In 2024, Southern Living named Abingdon one of the "20 Most Charming Tiny Towns in the South," and Abingdon has topped USA Today's 10Best list for Small Town Food Scenes for four straight years. Those accolades are thanks to the talented tastemakers of Abingdon who have joined forces to make the town's vibrant spirit unforgettable.

WHERE TO STAY

Abingdon has familiar hotel chains, but for a memorable stay, look to **The Martha Washington Inn & Spa**. Known as "The Martha" around town, this luxury hotel sits in the heart of downtown on Main Street, just steps from shops and

restaurants. Built as a home for General Francis Preston, it became Martha Washington College in the early 19th century and now welcomes guests with amenities including a fitness center, indoor pool and spa.

CULTURAL CORNERSTONES

Appalachian art and entertainment have many homes in Abingdon. Visitors should start at the **Southwest Virginia Cultural Center & Marketplace**, which calls itself "the welcome mat of the region." The building sports a modern farmhouse aesthetic and includes event space and a visitor center. The expansive marketplace displays and sells art, photography and handcrafted items made by some of the region's best artisans.

The nearby **William King Museum of Art**, housed in a 1913 school building, showcases local and national exhibits and a rich collection of regional decorative arts. Across the street, **The Arts Depot** has housed seven resident artist studios, member galleries and a community space



since 1990.

The Barter Theatre, just a few feet away from The Martha, is a defining component of Abingdon's cultural landscape. America's longest-running professional theater, it stages around 20 productions annually.

DINING HIGHLIGHTS

Abingdon's food scene is impressive for a town its size, offering everything from French and New American to authentic Italian and Asian fusion at varying price points. "Abingdon is definitely punching above its weight with over 40 independent restaurants, nearly half of which are chef-owned," says chef Hugh Belcher, owner of the coffee bar and cafe **The Girl & The Raven**.

A sampling of standout spots includes **Greeko's Grill and Café**, serving up classic favorites along with fun twists like flavorful Greek nachos with chicken; **The Peppermill**, a go-to for comfort food; and **Delta Blues BBQ**, which offers Southern barbecue accompanied by live music. **SweetBay Brewing** serves craft beer, and **Abingdon Vineyards** pairs wine with sweeping Appalachian views. 🍷

SAVE THE DATES



The Barter Theatre tells the story of one of country music's greatest jam sessions with a production of "Million Dollar Quartet," opening April 11 and running through May 11. bartertheatre.com

Catch the best of what's around as the **Abingdon Farmers Market's** regular season kicks off this month. Growers and makers from within a 50-mile radius set up shop in downtown Abingdon on Saturday mornings and Tuesday afternoons through the fall. abingdonfarmersmarket.com



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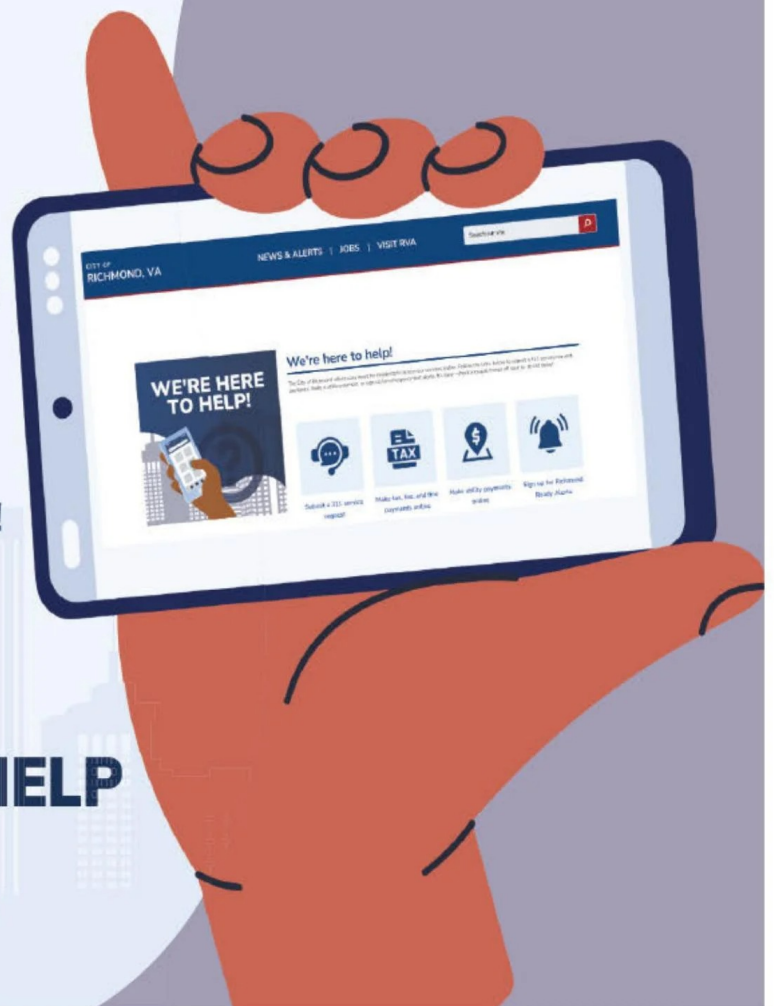
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Camps and Schools



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CAMP BLUE SKY

Camp Blue Sky is the perfect summer solution for working families, where kids can have fun just being kids. Children who have completed a year of kindergarten through age 12 get an age-appropriate summer camp program where they can learn and play as much as they want. Led by trained and committed counselors, our programs provide a carefully designed summer-long growth experience. Our campers will make

new friends, learn to respect the strengths and differences of their peers, and, together with our staff, develop pride for their community and the leadership skills necessary for personal success. leafspringschool.com

SOAR365

For kids and adults with disabilities, finding the right summer camp can be difficult — but not at SOAR365. Here, campers with disabilities enjoy all the traditional fun of summer camp, including horseback riding, fishing, hiking, and arts and crafts. With 22 peaceful acres of woodlands, Camp Baker has been home to SOAR365's Summer Camp since 1954. This lush, green location features a swimming pool and plenty of space for dance parties, face painting and talent shows. With a little extra care and support, everyone gets to join in the fun! Camper Rusty Graham's favorite things are playing sports, creating art and making new friends. It's no wonder, then, that if you ask about his favorite part of SOAR365's Summer Camp, he says, "Everything!" Learn more and register for SOAR365's Summer Camp at soar365.org/summer-camp.

SPARC

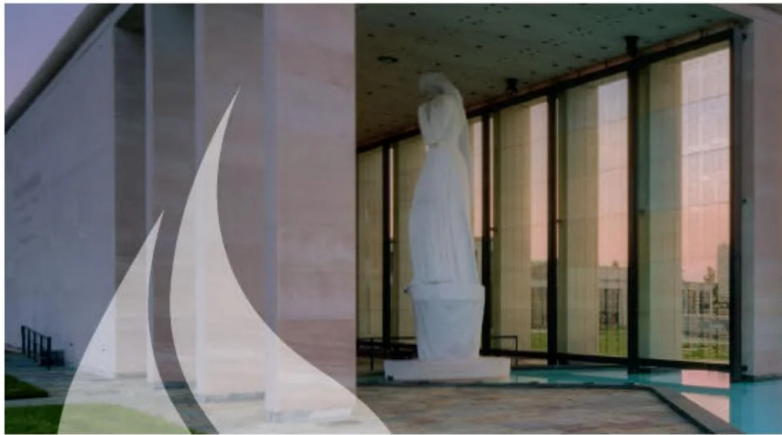
SPARC's award-winning performing arts camps are carefully curated for youth to explore theatrical learning while making friends and expanding their creativity! Camps incorporate skills like creative drama, musical theater, technical theater and more. At the end of each camp session, youth take center stage and perform what they've learned for a live audience of friends and family. SPARC's camps are open to youth ages 4 to 18 with all levels of experience in theater. With half-day programs for the youngest of campers, early arrival and extended afternoon care, a robust scholarship program, and satellite locations throughout the Richmond community, SPARC's camps provide flexible, safe spaces for youth during the summer months. sparrichmond.org

TRINITY SUMMER DISCOVERY PROGRAM

Learn, play and create at the Trinity Summer Discovery Program. From basketball to field hockey and from writing to pottery, there is something for everyone this summer at Trinity. Learn new skills on the courts and fields from championship-level coaches, or explore the arts in the school's 4,000-square-foot visual arts center. For complete details, dates and rates, please visit trinityes.org/summer.

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Discover award-winning camps at the Weinstein JCC, voted #1 by Richmond magazine readers for 11 years running! Our camps offer fun and safety for kids from preschool through 10th grade. With activities such as outdoor adventures, enriching field trips and specialty camps, there's something for every interest. We welcome families of all backgrounds and foster a supportive, inclusive environment where children explore, learn and grow. Spaces are limited, so don't wait — secure your spot today at weinsteinjcc.org for a summer filled with fun, discovery and lasting memories. Join us in shaping brighter futures, one adventure at a time!



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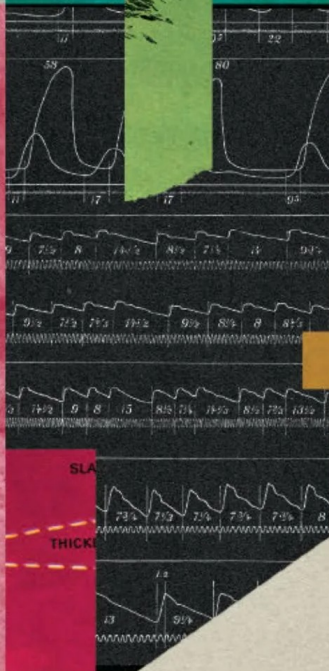
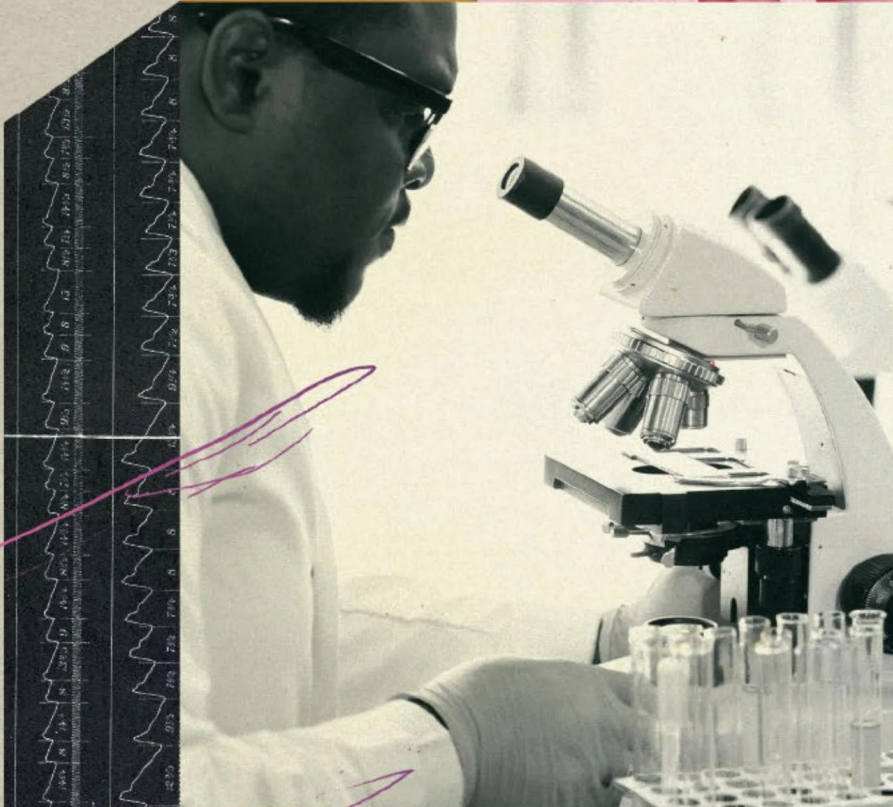
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ON TRIAL

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DOCS

Clinical research is
an essential step in
advancing medicine

BY THARON A. GIDDENS

ILLUSTRATION BY BLAKE CALE

FOR NORTH SIDE RESIDENT

Annie Campbell, the odds that she would beat breast cancer looked to be in her favor.

Campbell was diagnosed in October 2022 with HER2, an aggressive form of the disease. It was considered deadly until the early 2000s, when a treatment with a 95% cure rate was developed. Campbell, unfortunately, found herself in the other 5%.

She was treated at Virginia Commonwealth University's VCU Massey Comprehensive Cancer Center, undergoing six rounds of tough chemotherapy followed by surgery and radiation treatments. The surgery found resid-

ual cancer, which had spread to her lymph nodes. Campbell was eligible for a clinical trial at Massey, but she was reluctant to participate so soon after her initial treatment. Friends warned her that her type of cancer comes back, and that she would want "every layer of protection" she could have.

Campbell thought about it, how all medical advances begin with trials. And then life intervened: One of her daughters was also diagnosed with breast cancer. Campbell volunteered to take part in the trial. "Once I decided to do it, I felt a connection with all the women who had ever been in trials and all the women in

trials now," she says.

It was a standard of care trial, meaning patients received standard treatment for someone in Campbell's situation with a medicine that was being tested for potential use. Like many trials, a portion of the patients received non-active, or placebo, care. The study, which ended last March, involved 14 sessions of chemotherapy, an infusion of the trial medicine and chemotherapy pills twice a day, and "some pretty heavy radiation."

Campbell does not know whether she received placebo or the study medication, but she did end the trial in remission, which she says gives her "permission to live my very best life." >

The ordeal was worthwhile. "I'm voting for my life," she says. "I really didn't look back."

Clinical trials are a crucial step in advancing medicine and saving lives. They are part of the process for getting new drugs on the market, whether that's medication for people with diabetes or chemotherapy to treat cancers. Clinical trials can lead to new diagnostics, earlier detection of diseases, or refinements in treatments to make them more effective or less toxic.

Trials are also a way for citizens to gain "access to tomorrow's medicine today," says Dr. Andrew Poklepovic, an oncologist and associate director for clinical research for the VCU Massey Comprehensive Cancer Center.

With more than 20 years' experience, Poklepovic says he has seen incredible advances in treating cancers thanks to trials. Early in his career, the survival rate from a diagnosis of Stage 4 melanoma was six months. Now, it's five years. "I've seen patients start a trial and survive their cancer because of the trial," he says.

As the medical field in the Richmond region has grown, medical trials have grown with it. Local doctors, scientists and patient volunteers, such as Campbell, are key players in a lucrative industry that impacts treatments worldwide.

THE COST OF CURES

Medical trials are a big business. In 2024, metro Richmond researchers were awarded \$115.4 million in federal grant funding for clinical trials, according to the National Institutes of Health Awards by Location & Organization database. The bulk of that funding went to Virginia Commonwealth University grants, which



Annie Campbell participated in a clinical trial through the VCU Massey Comprehensive Cancer Center.

totaled \$111.9 million for 272 projects. (The NIH had awarded an additional \$15.8 million to VCU for 42 grants as of late February.) Virginia State University in Petersburg received three NIH-awarded grants in 2024, valued at \$89,962.

Although the funding is substantial for the area, it's a fraction of the money spent on research each year. The NIH — which provide the bulk of funding for medical research in the United States — approved \$35 billion for 60,000 grants to biomedical researchers in 2024, according to ABC News.

Further, American studies are crucial to advancing medicine across the globe. From 1999 through mid-2024, the United States accounted for about 21% (186,497) of all clinical trials internationally, according to the World Health Organization. China was second, with nearly 15% (135,747) of all trials, followed by India, with 74,031, or a little over 8% of trials.

In February, the Trump administration announced plans to cap NIH funding for the indirect expenses incurred in research at 15% of grants. Researchers contend that limiting funding for support staff, maintenance, facilities and equipment could halt research. A federal judge in Boston imposed a temporary block on the plan, according to the Associated Press. The administration also blocked the NIH from reviewing new research grant applications, but by late February had partially lifted its freeze on the process.

Overall, federal funding is crucial to the trial process, according to Dr. William J. Irvin Jr., Bon Secours Richmond's clinical research director and director of oncology and an oncologist with the Bon Secours Cancer Institute at St. Francis Medical Center. "It

would be devastating to lose that, and it would set not only the United States back, but probably the world back by a decade," he says.

Funding from industry players, venture capitalists and foundations plays a role in the later stages of drug development, but federal funding is critical at the beginning of the process. "That investment has a huge [return], not just for the patron community, for the centers in which we work, but also for the public health," says Dr. Nicholas Johnson, division chief of neuromuscular and vice chair of research in the Department of Neurology for the VCU School of Medicine.

Some local research is less impacted by political headwinds. At HCA Healthcare's Richmond facilities, researchers receive more funding for their work from industry sources than from the government, so they are less vulnerable to changes in federal policies. "That allows us to continue to be very active and offer our patients and the Richmond population a lot of studies,"

says Dr. Nayef Abouzaki, an interventional cardiologist with Virginia Cardiovascular Specialists.

As of late February, HCA Virginia was accepting enrollments in more than 35 trials. Its research includes studies in prevention and interventions in acute disease, interventions in chronic and stable cases, and long-term follow-ups to prevent cardiovascular disease and its progression, according to Abouzaki.

FROM THEORY TO TREATMENT

For researchers and doctors, clinical trials are essential to delivering better care, says Dr. Patrick Nana-Sinkham, a pulmonologist and chair of the division of pulmonary disease and critical care medicine for the VCU School of Medicine's Department of Internal Medicine. "When we see patients in clinic, every patient that we see, we think to ourselves, 'Is this an opportunity to engage our patient in a new clinical study that may ultimately benefit them and benefit the patients to come?'" he explains. >

\$115.4

million in federal grant funding for clinical trials to metro Richmond researchers in 2024*

\$111.9

million in funding in grants for 272 projects at Virginia Commonwealth University

\$89,962

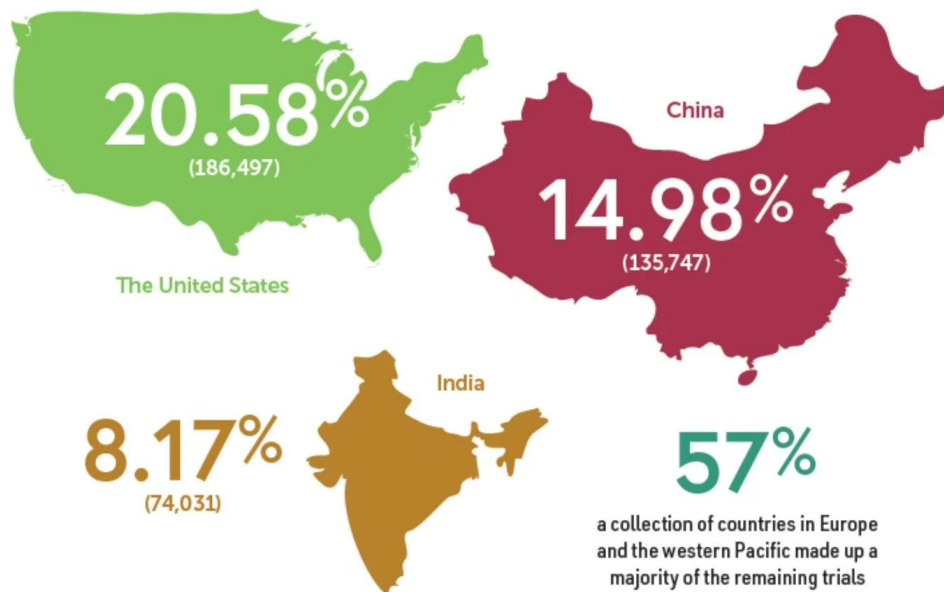
3 NIH-awarded grants to Virginia State University in Petersburg

\$15.8

million awarded to VCU through the NIH through 42 grants as of late February 2025

*Information available through an online search tool at the National Institutes of Health Awards by Location & Organization.

Percentage of all clinical trials from 1999 to 2024



"Analysis is the main tool that we have to test, really, any new intervention that we want to make in taking care of patients," he notes. "That may range from a new diagnostic test to testing a new drug to evaluating the way in which we deliver care, with a goal of trying to deliver better care. All of these are accomplished with clinical trials."

Nana-Sinkham adds, "[Research] is essential to providing the best care for our patients, not only today but tomorrow. We always want to place the patient first and give them the opportunity to benefit from the most innovative discovery that will improve their care."

The advancement of a new medicine from idea to approval may take a decade or longer. Laboratory testing — the basic science of determining if a treatment or medication may be viable — can take years on its own. It is followed by a Phase 1 trial, which investigates a drug's safety in humans, and then a Phase 2 trial, which looks at whether the drug works. In Phase 3, investigators examine whether the

treatment is equally or less toxic than the standard of care.

Testing parameters must have a certain number of patients and clearly show how many benefited or not, as well as those who experienced side effects. A treatment or medication can't be approved in the United States without testing. "It all comes down to the risk-benefit ratio," Abouzaki says.

Dr. Michael Arcarese, an interventional cardiologist with Cardiology

"[Research] is essential to providing the best care for our patients"

DR. PATRICK NANA-SINKHAM,
VCU SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Associates of Richmond, a part of HCA Healthcare, believes that trials are the basis of the practice of medicine. He notes that cardiology is the target of more medical trials than any other field. "One of the things I love most about cardiology is that everything we've done has been done through [clinical trials]," he says. "We've sort of proven that it works."

The HCA Research Institute, HCA Healthcare's multi-specialty research branch, provides the infrastructure for trials in HCA facilities in Richmond and helps connect the researchers with the funding, says Amma Agyemang, director of research for HCA's capital division and a member of the HCA Healthcare Research Institute. Locations with research programs include Chippenham, Henrico Doctors' and Johnston-Willis hospitals.

Pharmaceutical and biotech companies will contact the institute regarding opportunities for trials, Agyemang explains. The institute then passes the information to its physicians to gauge their interest. At times, the companies will contact researchers directly, and they in turn work with the institute to move the process forward.

A LOCUS FOR TRIALS

Richmond has become a top destination for clinical trials, but whether talent and money followed or lured the research is a bit of a chicken-and-egg question.

Research centers such as the Children's Hospital of Richmond and its Children's Hospital Foundation represent an investment in enticing leading scientist physicians to live and work in Richmond, says Johnson, while Nana-Sinkham asserts that VCU and VCU Health are a "destination center for

innovative research.”

VCU offers a unique combination of assets in its clinical research base, including its medical center, the dentistry, business and engineering schools, and the Children's Hospital. “This allows us the opportunity to build scientific teams that span a spectrum of research,” Nana-Sinkham adds.

In addition, the region's advancement is undergirded by a confluence of willing local participants and a strong medical network. “It really starts to

come with population density and clinical scales,” Poklepovic says. “We are lucky to have [those] here in such great abundance.” He notes that Richmond is fortunate to have a well-developed health care system with three major players (Bon Secours, HCA and VCU Health) that all offer clinical trials, creating treatment opportunities that aren't available elsewhere. “We all know that one of the best ways to treat patients is to put on a clinical trial,” Poklepovic says.

Trial hosts identify the Richmond region's residents — a diverse population with a track record of enthusiastic volunteering — as uniquely attractive for clinical research and a major reason that trials for COVID-19 remediations like AstraZeneca's vaccine and Gilead's remdesivir treatment came to Richmond in 2020.

Population wise, this region has been among the fastest growing in the state since the pandemic. That residential boom has brought a great- ➤

HOW IT WORKS

Trials are used to test potential medicines, treatments or procedures. The National Institutes for Health define a clinical trial as a research study in a person or people in which subjects are subjected to the medication, procedure or treatment or placebo to evaluate effectiveness and safety of a product or procedure.

Researchers may stop a trial after Phase 1 or Phase 2 if the test procedure or product is unsafe or ineffective. If it proceeds through Phase 3, researchers examine and may publish the results for peer review. If those are deemed satisfactory, they may seek approval from the U.S. Food & Drug Administration. Development of a trial, from an idea to placing a medication or treatment on the market, may take 10 or more years.

Types of Trials

Behavioral trial: Evaluates a new way to encourage changes in how people behave to improve health

Diagnostic trial: Evaluates a new way to diagnose a disease or condition

Prevention trial: Evaluates a procedure that prevents a disease from recurring or from never developing in a person who has never had the disease or condition

Screening trial: Evaluation of a novel way to look for a disease or condition

Supportive care trial: Test of a procedure to improve quality of life or comfort of a person with a condition or illness

Treatment trial: Testing out of a new way to treat a disease or condition

Trial Phases

Trials are generally developed in a laboratory or from observations in a practice. Medications may be initially tested without human involvement. When they are deemed likely to be safe in humans, they proceed through phases.

Phase 1: A small group (20-80 subjects) is involved in testing a drug or treatment to determine safety and possible side effects.

Phase 2: The second round of testing expands to a group of 100 to 300 subjects to determine safety and side effects.

Phase 3: An even larger group of subjects (1,000 to 3,000) is treated to confirm effectiveness and side effects. Phase 3 also involves comparison with standard or similar treatments. The trial treatment or procedure is submitted for approval to the U.S. Food & Drug Administration.

Phase 4: A post-approval and post-marketing phase to track safety and seek more information about benefits and optimal use

er need for access to trials because, as Bon Secours' Irvin notes, with more people comes more illness. Growth and the area's attractions — such as new housing, great amenities, cultural and recreational opportunities, and a robust health industry infrastructure — suggest more trials are in store.

And we aren't just Richmond famous. Progress has also drawn patients from farther afield, such as Brooklyn Garza, a 17-year-old with limb girdle muscular dystrophy type 2A.

The disease impacts core muscles and steals mobility, which led Brooklyn to experience progressive weakness in her arms and upper thighs and left



COURTESY MELINA GARZA

her with a waddling gait. She can't run, jog or walk long distances. "I need help with basic things like getting out of bed, dressing and bathing," she says. "I miss school for medical appointments, and I always have to consider accessibility, making sure there aren't stairs everywhere I go, planning how long I can stay somewhere before I get too tired and figuring out whether I'll have the help I need."

A Texas resident and advocate for people with the disorder, Brooklyn has come to Richmond and the VCU Medical Center twice to participate in a natural history study. The goal is to gather data to create a better understanding of the disorder's prevalence in the population and its impact on people who have it.

The Garza family signed up for the VCU study because Brooklyn was eager to work with Johnson, the VCU School of Medicine doctor who specializes in treating adults and children with neuromuscular conditions. He is also an active researcher, finding lab time each week to investigate genetic muscle disorders such as MD type 2A.

"Dr. Johnson is a leading neurologist in the field," says Brooklyn's mother,

Brooklyn Garza
receiving an MRI
as part of a VCU
clinical trial

Melina Garza. "[We] were definitely coming to see him." Good data is the foundation of viable trials and treatments, so the Garzas were eager to participate.

After her study session in February, Brooklyn was scheduled for a third round of testing in another year. She and her mother would like to see the schedule moved up. "Our hope and dream would be for her to get placed in a trial," Melina says, adding that sooner would be better. If Brooklyn's condition progresses to the point where she is unable to walk, it's unlikely doctors could "bring that ability back to her."

Such trials offer hope to the Garzas and families across the world.

Explains Johnson, "These are patients and parents who are quite desperate for something to change the course of [these] diseases and are willing to do almost anything to see if they can get access to one of these treatments." ■

Learn More: Ongoing studies play a role in improving the health of Richmond and the country. Finding a trial in the region starts with the National Library of Medicine's online registry of active trials at clinicaltrials.gov.

VCU and VCU Health are
the epicenter of clinical
trials in metro Richmond.
Here's a snapshot.

9,443

Current active enrollment
in clinical research

2,500

Participants enrolled in
clinical trials in 2024

384

VCU-designed, faculty
led clinical studies

124

VCU-designed clinical
trials, faculty-led

TOP²⁰₂₅ DOCS

THE BEST CARE IN 94 CATEGORIES,
AS CHOSEN BY RICHMOND-AREA
MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS

Here are the 443 top vote recipients, as selected by the 1,058 professionals who took part in our online survey. The top five are listed in each category. Some categories may have more than five doctors due to ties; others may have fewer than five because there were insufficient votes in that category.

Yellow highlight denotes top vote-getter in category

ADDICTION MEDICINE

Peter Breslin

Verity Mental Health,
3974 Springfield
Road, Suite A, Glen
Allen, 804-495-8661

Megan Lemay

VCU Health,
Ambulatory Care
Center, 417 N. 11th
St., 804-828-2161

Caitlin E. Martin

VCU Health, Adult
Outpatient Pavilion,
1001 E. Leigh St.;
Jackson Center,
501 N. 2nd St.; Stony
Point 9105, 9105
Stony Point Drive,
804-828-4409

Vincent Nardone

Foundation Medical
Group, 1807
Huguenot Road,
Suite 117, Midlothian,
804-506-0526

Stephen Popovich

Bon Secours, Bon
Secours St. Mary's
Hospital, 5801 Brema
Road, 804-285-2011

Brandon Wills

VCU Health, VCU
Medical Center
Critical Care Hospital,
1213 E. Clay St.,
804-828-2000

ALLERGY AND IMMUNOLOGY

William Hark

Richmond Allergy &
Asthma Specialists,
9920 Indepen-
dence Park Drive,
Suite 100, Henrico,
804-285-7420

Santhosh Kumar

Children's Hospital
of Richmond at
VCU, Children's
Pavilion, 1000 E.
Broad St.; Ches-
terfield Meadows,
6433 Centralia Road,
Chesterfield, 804-
828-CHOR (2467)

Patrick Powers

Allergy Partners of
Richmond, 8485-B
Bell Creek Road,
Mechanicsville,
804-369-9269

Kelley Von Elten

RVA Allergy, 7229
Forest Ave., Suite
104, 804-285-5000

Wei Zhao

Children's Hospital
of Richmond at
VCU, Children's
Pavilion, 1000 E.
Broad St.; Ches-
terfield Meadows,
6433 Centralia Road,
Chesterfield, 804-
828-CHOR (2467)

ANESTHESIOLOGY

Ilia Brusilovsky

VCU Health, VCU
Medical Center Main
Hospital, 1250 E.
Marshall St.; Adult
Outpatient Pavilion,
1001 E. Leigh St.,
804-828-2161

Ronsard Daniel

VCU Health, VCU
Medical Center Main
Hospital, 1250 E.
Marshall St.; Adult
Outpatient Pavilion,
1001 E. Leigh St.,
800-762-6161

Barry Rose

Dogwood Anesthesia
Providers, 1401
Johnston-Willis
Drive, 804-483-0745

James Stone Jr.

Dogwood Anesthesia
Providers, 1401
Johnston-Willis
Drive, 804-483-0745

Janine L.

Thekkekandam

HCA Virginia, HCA
Johnston-Willis
Hospital, 1401
Johnston Willis Drive,
804-483-5214

Matthew

Douglas Wood

West End Anesthesia
Group, 5801 Brema
Road, 804-288-6258

CARDIAC ELECTROPHYSIOLOGY

An Hong Bui

Bon Secours, Bon
Secours Cardiology,
7001 Forest Ave.,
Suite 200; 13710 St.
Francis Blvd., Suite
600, Midlothian,
804-288-3123

Kenneth Ellenbogen

VCU Health Pauley
Heart Center, VCU
Medical Center
Gateway Building,
1200 E. Marshall
St.; Ambulatory
Care Center, 417
N. 11th St.; Stony
Point 9000, 9000
Stony Point Parkway,
804-628-4327

Matthew Ngo

Bon Secours, Bon
Secours Cardiology,

7001 Forest Ave.,
Suite 200; 13710 St.
Francis Blvd., Suite
600, Midlothian,
804-288-3123

Saunil R. Shah

Virginia Arrhyth-
mia Consultants,
1001 Boulders
Parkway, Suite 110,
804-410-9749

Richard Shepard

VCU Health, VCU
Medical Center
Gateway Building,
1200 E. Marshall St.,
804-628-4327

CARDIOLOGY

Hem Bhardwaj

VCU Health Pauley
Heart Center,
Ambulatory Care
Center, 417 N. 11th
St., 804-628-4327

William Coble

Virginia Cardiovascular
Specialists, 6120
Harbourside Centre
Loop, Midlothian,
804-288-4827

Barnett T. Gibbs

HCA Virginia, Henrico
Cardiology Asso-
ciates, 7603 Forest
Ave., Suite 202, 804-
288-0134; 7702 E.
Parham Road, Suite
106, 804-346-2070

Mark Johns

Cardiology of
Virginia, 13572
Waterford Place,
Midlothian,
804-560-8782

Vipal Sabharwal

Bon Secours, Bon
Secours Cardiology,

7001 Forest Ave.,
Suite 200,
804-288-3123

Jeremy Turlington

VCU Health Pauley
Heart Center,
VCU Medical Center
Main Hospital,
1250 E. Marshall St.;
Ambulatory Care
Center, 417 N. 11th
St., 800-762-6161

CARDIOLOGY (INTERVENTIONAL)

Michael Arcarese

HCA Virginia,
Henrico Cardiology
Associates, 7603
Forest Ave., Suite
202, 804-288-0134

Zachary Gertz

VCU Health Pauley
Heart Center,
VCU Medical Center
Gateway Building,
1200 E. Marshall
St.; VCU Medical
Center Main Hospital,
1250 E. Marshall St.,
804-628-4327

Manu Kaushik

Bon Secours, Bon
Secours Cardiology,
7001 Forest Ave.,
Suite 200,
804-288-3123

Barbara Lawson

VCU Health Pauley
Heart Center, VCU
Medical Center
Gateway Building,
1200 E. Marshall
St.; VCU Medical
Center Main Hospital,
1250 E. Marshall St.;
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Center, 417 N. 11th

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[CONT'D ON P. 89 >

Yellow highlight denotes top vote-getter in category.



CJ James began playing football as an emotional outlet. She now owns the River City Sting.

ELIJAH HEDRICK/RIVER CITY STING

MARY

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL IN RICHMOND IS RACKING UP THE YARDS

BY ADAM CHEEK

R

ichmond may have cycled through a half-dozen arena football teams since the turn of the century and saw the Washington Commanders NFL training camp come and go, but one gridiron sport has remained constant in the river city for nearly a decade: women's tackle football.

The region's first team was the Richmond Black Widows, founded in 2015. The River City Sting are marking a half-decade of play this year, and the RVA Lady Tomahawks were launched in 2023. The three teams are in different leagues with varying rules, but they all offer satisfying game-play for fans eager to keep up with football during professional and college teams' offseasons. And, like other local teams, these organizations work just as hard off the field at building a following for their sport.

"[Women's football] definitely has a presence here," says Keisha Pleasants, a defensive tackle for the Tomahawks. "Richmond has a lot of women's teams, period. The teams that we'll be playing this year are experienced, so it's going to be some good competition." >

“

YEAR 10 IS HUGE FOR US, BECAUSE A LOT OF TEAMS DON'T MAKE IT TO YEAR 10. IT'S A MILESTONE MOMENT.”

Jessica Harris, COO of the Richmond Black Widows



THE LINEUPS

The Richmond Black Widows were formed in 2015 by Sarah Schkeeper, a New Jersey native who played with the New York Sharks from 2009 to 2013. After leaving the Sharks, Schkeeper relocated to Richmond and, discovering the city didn't have a women's football team, started one. The team hit the field in 2016 as part of the Women's Football Alliance. Schkeeper has since moved away, and her mother, Liane Schkeeper, now owns the Black Widows.

"We were the first [women's football] team here in Richmond, and it's really exciting to see how the sport has grown in the

area and in the state in general," says Jessica Harris, the team's chief operating officer and a former player. "Year 10 is huge for us, because a lot of teams don't make it to year 10. It's a milestone moment."

Harris joined the Black Widows in the team's first season when an acquaintance suggested she try out. "I was doing it simply to get in shape [at first]," she says. "I found out the same way most of our players and recruits do, by word of mouth, and I've been here ever since. It gets into your blood. You can't help it."

For CJ James, who owns the River City Sting, football was an outlet. "In 2013, I unfortunately lost my mother to her third bout of breast cancer," James says. "Just like anyone dealing with grief, I had a lot of trials and tribulations along the way. I actually started playing football in 2016 and fell in love with it. I was a bit shocked that I decided to do it, but in a way, it was just a great positive outlet for me to cope with everything."

"As women, we aren't always given the opportunity to be aggressive, and as a Black woman, it's even more so," she adds. "So, for football to come along, that was the perfect opportunity."

A lifelong athlete, Shebeney Jackson was one of the founding owners of the RVA Tomahawks men's semipro team in 2017. After getting some firsthand experience playing for a women's team in Newport News in 2022, Jackson left the gridiron and launched the Lady Tomahawks in 2023. Her husband, Jerome,

is the team's defensive coordinator and another Tomahawks owner. He and the Lady Tomahawks' general manager and line coach, Jason Niles, played together in the past; both men were on numerous championship semipro teams and are Minor League Football Hall of Fame and Amateur Football Hall of Fame inductees.

"Football, to me, has always been an experience ... where a group of people can come together, no matter of ethnicity, religious background or anything," Niles says. "Everybody's out there for football, and it brings people together."

The sentiment extends across all three teams.

"I have always valued our team as a family," James says of the Sting. "Just being able to have that camaraderie is huge, because there are a lot of women, and just people in general, who don't have that at home or who just need additional support. We're here for more than just football."

RULES AND REGS

Women's tackle football games are largely similar to the matches men's college and pro teams play on TV every fall: Teams field squads of 11 with familiar offensive and defensive line structure and plays. However, because Richmond's three teams all play for different leagues, fans who go out to games will notice differences in the details when the women's seasons kick off this month.

The Black Widows are a WFA Division 3 team. They'll play teams from North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Tennessee, among others, during their six-game season. The WFA, which has nearly 60 teams, largely follows NCAA rules.

The Lady Tomahawks and Sting have both switched leagues — and rulebooks — several times.



CJ James,
owner of the
River City Sting



The Richmond Black Widows' first of three home games is May 10.

2025 SCHEDULE

RICHMOND BLACK WIDOWS

April 26
Harrisburg Havoc (away)

May 10
Music City Mizfits (home)

May 17
Carolina Phoenix (home)

May 31
Virginia Panthers (away)

June 7
Raleigh Express (home)

June 14
Music City Mizfits (away)

According to Niles, the Lady Tomahawks first played with NFL rules before switching to modified high school protocols. After joining the American Women's Football League for the 2025 season, the team will follow NCAA rules with a dash of XFL-like extra-point procedures. The Lady Tomahawks will compete against teams from Georgia, Michigan and Tennessee.

The River City Sting won the United States Women's Football League championship in their inaugural 2021 season, going undefeated. As part of the Women's Tackle Football League, they made the championship game again in 2022 and 2024. James says they aim to do the same after joining the United States Premier Women's Football League in 2025. A developmental league that follows a mixture of rules, the USPWF will allow the Sting to pay players and staff

as they face off against teams from Ohio, Tennessee, Georgia and Alabama this year.

FIELDING A TEAM

One of the biggest challenges for all three teams is finding a place to play.

"Getting a venue is very, very hard," the Black Widows' Harris says. "We start that process early. Sports are geared towards the kids first, rightfully so, and sometimes that leaves us on the back burner. That's probably been the biggest struggle, finding somewhere to practice and play."

James says the Sting's venue is determined by a lottery system, with youth sports taking precedence, and that the team won't know its home field until closer to the start of the season this month.

"It's essentially wherever we can get >



2024 RVA Lady Tomahawks

2025 SCHEDULE

RVA LADY TOMAHAWKS

April 5
Tennessee Enforcers (away)

April 12
Atlanta Phoenix (home)

April 26
Lansing Legacy (home)

May 3
Carolina Tigers (away)

May 10
DMV Queens (home)

May 17
Kalamazoo Bears (away)

May 31
Playoffs, Wild Card Round

June 14
Playoffs, Division Round

June 28
Conference Championship

July 12
Emerald Bowl

a field," she says. "It varies from year to year — we've played at Godwin High School, Dinwiddie Sports Complex and Varina High School."

The Lady Tomahawks currently practice at Varina, Niles says, while two of the team's three 2025 home games will take place at Highland Springs High School. Highland Springs was also the Tomahawks' home field last year.

PATHS TO THE GRIDIRON

Players have followed all kinds of routes to the rosters of the Black Widows, Sting and Lady Tomahawks. Rian Moses-Hedrick, a visual artist who also co-founded the music platform HearRVA and Richmond Music Week, came across the Sting by way of a newsletter and signed on in 2024.

"I couldn't believe how badass they were," Moses-Hedrick says. "I brought in a lot of my friends, just to the games. It's crazy that I picked up a part-time job playing tackle football. I hope that we can get into more spaces. We try to do a lot of community outreach, and I'm hoping to get more younger girls into flag football and then

transition into tackle football."

Chandler Simms, who played for the Black Widows and has officiated in the area, says, "[Football] really opened up a whole new world for me. I traveled with the WFA international team, so I've gone around the world to help teach football and participate in clinics."

Simms played most positions during her time on the field and has remained an avid fan of the team since retiring from play. Dubbing herself the "president of the Black Widow retirees," she helps with fundraising, getting the word out and even announcing games. "[Football] has also brought people to Richmond," she says. "We have players who didn't live in Richmond, and they would travel here to play. It still brings more people to the city, and they support local businesses while they're here."

All of the teams pride themselves on their openness and inclusiveness.

"We have so many players that have so many reasons why they're playing," Niles says. "We are very diverse. We have straight women, we have gay women and we have trans women. Our youngest player, because our insurance allows it, is 15 years

“

OUR PLAYERS ARE THE BEST ADVERTISING POSSIBLE, BECAUSE ANY FEMALE YOU TALK TO WHO PLAYS – THEY EAT, SLEEP AND BREATHE THIS SPORT.”

CJ James, owner of the River City Sting

2025 SCHEDULE

RIVER CITY STING

April 19
Cincinnati Sizzle (away)

April 26
Bye

May 3
Ardmore Tigers (away)

May 10
Gulf Coast Mystery (home)

May 17
Cincinnati Sizzle (home)

May 24
Bye

May 31
Ardmore Tigers (home)

June 7
Gulf Coast Mystery (away)

old. Last year, our oldest player was 53. We have a diverse range of people with [diverse] experiences, and we're very welcoming."

Depending on the team, tryouts take place at various times of the year and are typically open to the public; anyone who identifies as a woman is welcome. The teams welcome inexperienced players, saying they learn, develop and evolve in their positions over the course of the season.

"The best part is that we're seeing women who have never played before turning into amazing players by the end of the season," James says. "It's a cool thing to see the growth, investment, and to see them excited at practice, making great plays and having that support."

The mix of experience levels from rookies to veterans contributes to well-rounded rosters. Several members of the Black Widows have been with the team for all 10 years, including Harris and three others who still play. Even the Tomahawks, who are beginning their third season, have some experienced players on the roster.

"I was able to get a lot of sacks my first game, become MVP during the season and be rookie of the year as well," Aliyah Porter says. She's a Tomahawks defensive end and tackle who is also learning to play tight end. "Playing football is very therapeutic, so I get to release a lot when I'm out there. ... I enjoy playing with the ladies, like a big family. I go out there, I laugh, I smile and we have a good time."

'TAKING OFF'

One of the teams' shared challenges is simply getting the word out about women's tackle football. All three rely primarily on word of mouth to promote themselves. The

teams attend community events such as 804 Day in August, parades, and the Flying Squirrels' Women and Girls in Sports Day; participate in social media; stream their games online; and are available for personal appearances.

"Our players are the best advertising possible, because any female you talk to who plays – they eat, sleep and breathe this sport," Harris says. "It's kind of hard not to. It gets into your veins."

The Black Widows have been playing long enough for some of their efforts to come full circle. While DJ Thompson was playing for her elementary school team, she did a coin toss for the Black Widows; years later, she plays for the team. Harris says the Widows will celebrate those connections at the team's last home game of the season on June 7. "We're going to invite all of our OG players and fans," she says. >



See the River City Sting in action on April 26.



Defensive end Tylar Lawrence and her Lady Tomahawks teammates during 2024 pre-game warmups

"That's going to be a game that we play for them, and we're going to honor them. We've got some awesome things in the works for that game, and this season, to pay homage to year 10 ... and looking forward to the future."

James says making sure people know about the team is its own reward. "I think

it's nice when we actually meet people in the streets and they're like, 'Hey, I know about you guys,'" she says. "That makes us feel great. That's a proud moment."

Niles notes that publicity is useful for recruiting new players — the Lady Tomahawks encourage the parents of younger players to get involved, too — as

well as dispelling preconceived notions about the leagues. "When I say I'm coaching women's football, some people's first question is if it's a lingerie league," he says, alluding to the Lingerie Football League, which existed from 2009 to 2012 and has since rebranded. "No. These women will probably take your head off. It's becoming a bigger brand."

James agrees that women's football is growing, pointing to the Sting's expanding local fan base. "We've had our ups and downs, just like any other team, but overall, we've had our faithful core, and it's nice to bring more folks into our fan base."

Niles says the Lady Tomahawks are seeing growth as well. "Last year, we had a decent amount of fans come out to watch our games. It takes a lot of background work to try to get the word out. Our players spread the word as much as they can, and a lot of people back those players up. Women's football is taking off." ■

“
WHEN I SAY I'M COACHING WOMEN'S FOOTBALL, SOME PEOPLE'S FIRST QUESTION IS IF IT'S A LINGERIE LEAGUE. NO. THESE WOMEN WILL PROBABLY TAKE YOUR HEAD OFF.”

Jason Niles, Lady Tomahawks' general manager and line coach



CAPTURE SOME FUN

Flag football is a low-contact alternative

Local women who want to hit the gridiron but don't necessarily want to try a tackle team have another option: flag football.

Shà Maclin founded the 804 Mafia Women's Flag Football Team in 2022. She was looking to move from playing tackle football to an all-women's flag team but didn't find one in the area. She started her own, giving the group a "Godfather"-esque logo and an orange-and-black color scheme.

"I think, with the popularity [of women's football], people have been looking for flag, and I think flag helps feed into tackle," Maclin says. "Flag gives them an opportunity to see how they want to play, see if they know football, and then



804 Mafia

they can decide which kind of team they want to play on."

Part of the Coastal Women's Flag League, 804 Mafia is an eight-person contact team that currently plays at Varina High School. The positions and play are similar to standard football, but each player wears a belt with two streamer-like flags that are pulled off in lieu of tackling; players can also be downed with a two-hand touch. The league offers spring

and fall seasons as well as tournaments.

Maclin says the team has grown threefold since its founding, from fewer than 10 players to the current roster of about 30. "We've grown quite a bit, and there's been more and more interest as the years have come," she adds. Flag football will be included in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, fueling interest in the sport.

Like the tackle teams, 804 Mafia gets the word out

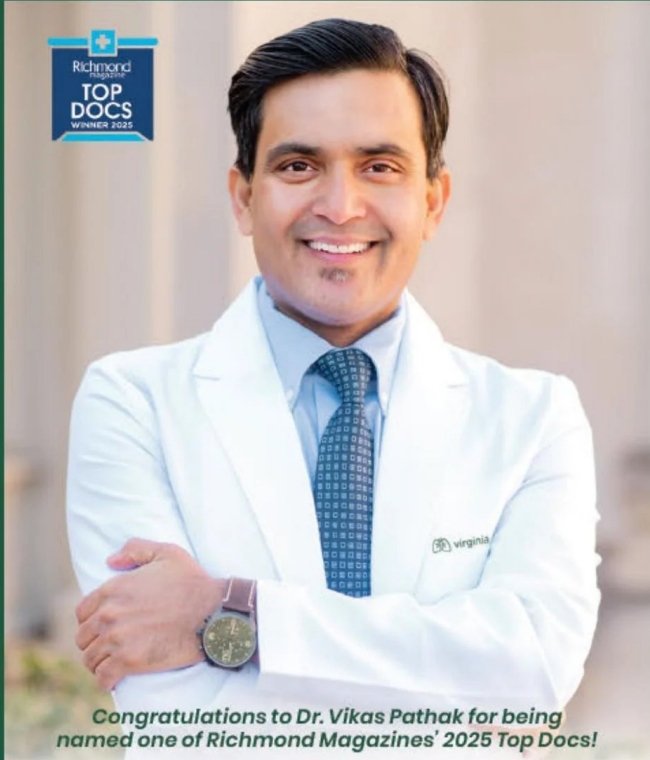
through social media and community events. "We've done a lot of social events," Maclin says. "We've also been involved with the youth flag leagues. A lot of our players are coaches [there], and we get to meet a lot of the parents. Some of the parents are even interested in playing."

"If you love football, it's just a place for you to get started," Maclin says. "Flag is fast-paced, and it's a lot of fun. We've grown so much." —AC



804 MAFIA

Interested in joining the 804 Mafia or catching a game? Open workouts and tryouts start in early June, and the team will participate in two tournaments over the summer: the Virginia Beach Invitational on June 21 and Clash at the Carolinas on Aug. 9. The season will start after Labor Day, and the 804 Mafia will play at least four home games at Varina, plus nationals in Florida in January 2026.



Congratulations to Dr. Vikas Pathak for being named one of Richmond Magazines' 2025 Top Docs!



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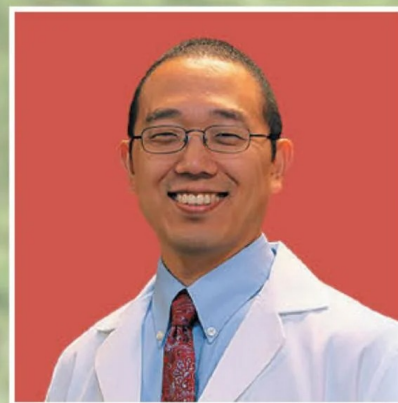
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 VCU Health, Nelson Clinic, 401 N. 11th St.; Stony Point 9109, 9109 Stony Point Drive, 804-828-9361
Laurie Shinn
 Commonwealth Dermatology, 7001 Forest Ave., Suite 400, 804-282-0831

EMERGENCY MEDICINE

Dusty Anderson

Bon Secours, Bon Secours Richmond Health System, Emergency Department, 5855 Bremono Road, 804-287-7066
Daniel Angeli
 HCA Virginia, HCA Henrico Doctors' Hospital, 1602 Skipwith Road, 804-289-4500
Charles DeVerna
 HCA Virginia, HCA CJW Medical Center, 1401 Johnston Willis Drive, North Chesterfield, 804-483-6000
Harinder Dhindsa
 VCU Health, VCU Medical Center Critical Care Hospital, 1213 E. Clay St., 800-762-6161
Peter Moffett
 VCU Health, VCU Medical Center Critical Care Hospital, 1213 E. Clay St., 800-762-6161

ENDOCRINOLOGY, DIABETES AND METABOLISM

Pablo Bedoya

Virginia Diabetes & Endocrinology, 7650 E. Parham Road, MOB II, Suite 210, 804-272-2702
Douglas Johnson
 Bon Secours, Bon Secours Richmond

Diabetes and Endocrinology, 8266 Atlee Road, MOB II, Suite 330, Mechanicsville, 804-287-7570

Trang Le

VCU Health, Center for Endocrinology, Diabetes and Metabolism, 2305 N. Parham Road, Suite 1, 804-828-CHOR (2467)

Akta Mukherjee

Virginia Endocrinology, 2384 Colony Crossing Place, Midlothian, 804-423-3636

Edmond Wickham

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU; Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St.; Center for Endocrinology, Diabetes and Metabolism, 2305 N. Parham Road, Suite 1, 804-828-CHOR (2467)

FAMILY/GENERAL PRACTICE

Arpita Aggarwal

Commonwealth Primary Care, 5360 Twin Hickory Road, Glen Allen, 804-346-3200

James A. Bush

Appomattox River Primary Care, 3512 Boulevard, Colonial Heights, 804-520-1110

Amanda George

VCU Health, Ambulatory Care Center, 417 N. 11th St., 804-828-9357

Richard L. Gergoudis

Commonwealth Primary Care, 1800 Glenside Drive, Suite 110, 804-288-1800
Giancarlo Pierantoni
 VCU Health, Mayland Medical Center, 3470 Mayland Court, 804-527-4540

J. Kenneth Zelenak

Commonwealth Primary Care, 1800 Glenside Drive, Suite 101, 804-288-3001

GASTROENTEROLOGY

Souheil Abou-Assi

Gastrointestinal Specialists Inc.,

Wadsworth Medical Clinic, 201 Wadsworth Drive, 804-285-8206

Stephen Bickston

VCU Health, Ambulatory Care Center, 417 N. 11th St., 804-828-7748; VCU Medical Center Gateway Building, 1200 E. Marshall St., 804-828-4060

Doumit BouHaidar

VCU Health, Stony Point 9109, 9109 Stony Point Drive, 804-828-4060

Ramy Eid

Gastrointestinal Specialists Inc., Wadsworth Medical Clinic, 201 Wadsworth Drive, 804-285-8206

Howard O. Haverty

Richmond Gastroenterology Associates, 223 Wadsworth Ave., North Chesterfield, 804-560-9856

Robert Mitchell

Mitchell Endoscopy Center, 7605 Forest Ave., Suite 211, 804-282-3114

Ravi K. Vachhani

VCU Health, Ambulatory Care Center, 417 N. 11th St., VCU Medical Center Gateway Building, 1200 E. Marshall St., 804-828-4060

GENETICS

Heather Hannon

Bon Secours, Bon Secours Cancer Institute, 5875 Bremono Road, Suite 209, 804-287-7804

Jennifer B. Humberson

UVA Pediatric Specialty Care Richmond, 5875 Bremono Road, Suite 500, 804-297-3055
John Quillin
 VCU Health, VCU Medical Center North Hospital, 1300 E. Marshall St., 800-762-6161; Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

GERIATRIC MEDICINE

Peter Boling

VCU Health, Center

for Advanced Health Management, 2116 W. Laburnum Ave., 804-254-3500

Julia Breton

VCU Health, Center for Advanced Health Management, 2116 W. Laburnum Ave., 804-254-3500

Sarah Hobgood

VCU Health, Ambulatory Care Center, 417 N. 11th St.; VCU Medical Center North Hospital, 1300 E. Marshall St.; Center for Advanced Health Management, 2116 W. Laburnum Ave., 804-254-3500

Kathryn Rackson

VCU Health, Center for Advanced Health Management, 2116 W. Laburnum Ave., 804-254-3500

Michael Weissberger

VCU Health, VCU Medical Center Gateway Building, 1200 E. Marshall St.; Center for Advanced Health Management, 2116 W. Laburnum Ave., 804-254-3500

GYNECOLOGIC ONCOLOGY

Cecelia H. Boardman

HCA Virginia, Virginia Gynecologic Oncology, 7607 Forest Ave., Suite 410; 930 South Ave., Suite 4C, Colonial Heights, 804-200-7062

Jori Carter

Women's Cancer and Wellness Institute, 9101 Stony Point Drive, Suite 3300, 804-323-5040

Johnny Hyde Jr.

Bon Secours, Bon Secours Commonwealth Gynecologic Oncology, 5875 Bremono Road, MOB South, Suite G-7, 804-323-5040
Chelsea Salyer
 VCU Health, VCU Medical Center Main Hospital, 1250 E. Marshall St.; Adult Outpatient Pavilion, 1001 E. Leigh St., 804-828-9080

Randal J. West

Women's Cancer and Wellness Institute, HCA Johnston-Willis Hospital, 1401 Johnston Willis Drive, Suite 1100, North Chesterfield, 804-323-5040

GYNECOLOGY/ OBSTETRICS (GENERAL)

Jennie Draper

Virginia Physicians for Women, 7605 Forest Ave., Suite 206, 1630 Wilkes Ridge Parkway, Suite 200, 804-897-2100

Cara Hartle

Virginia Physicians for Women, 5875 Bremono Road, Suite 201, 804-897-2100

Nicole Karjane

VCU Health, Stony Point 9105, 9105 Stony Point Drive; Adult Outpatient Pavilion, 1001 E. Leigh St., 804-828-4409

Thomas Mead

Dominion Women's Health, Dominion Medical Park, 8239 Meadowbridge Road, Suite A, Mechanicsville, 804-730-0800; 7605 Forest Ave., Suite 404, Henrico, 804-288-1106; 1051 Johnston Willis Drive, Suite 100, North Chesterfield, 804-464-2453

Vienne Murray

West End OBGYN, 7601 Forest Ave., Suite 100, 804-282-9479

Amanda Ritter

VCU Health, Adult Outpatient Pavilion, 1001 E. Leigh St.; Stony Point 9105, 9105 Stony Point Drive, 804-828-4409

HEMATOLOGY AND ONCOLOGY

Elke K. Friedman

Virginia Cancer Institute, 8007 Discovery Drive, 804-287-3000

Kelly Hagan

Virginia Cancer

Institute, 7492 Right Flank Road, Mechanicsville, 804-559-2489

Andrew Poklepovic

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Scott Matherly

VCU Health, VCU Stravitz-Sanyal Institute for Liver Disease and Metabolic Health, 1200 E. Marshall St., 804-828-4060

Arun Sanyal

VCU Health, VCU Stravitz-Sanyal Institute for Liver Disease and Metabolic Health, 1200 E. Marshall St.; VCU Medical Center Gateway Building, 1200 E. Marshall St.; Mayland Medical Center, 3470 Mayland Court, 804-828-4060

Mitchell L. Shiffman

Bon Secours, Bon Secours Liver Institute of Richmond, 5855 Bremono Road, Suite 509, 804-977-8920

Mohammad S. Siddiqui

VCU Health, VCU Stravitz-Sanyal Institute for Liver Disease and Metabolic Health, 1200 E. Marshall St., 804-828-4060 >

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Joel Wedd

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1200 E. Marshall St.,
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HOSPICE CARE

Jessica Allen

VCU Health,
VCU Medical Center
North Hospital,
1300 E. Marshall
St., 804-828-2161
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Suncrest Hospice,

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Suite 110, 804-
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Palliative Medicine,
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403, 804-288-
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Danielle Noreika
(posthumous)

HOSPITALIST – ADULT

Stephen Biederman

VCU Health,
VCU Medical Center
North Hospital,
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Aimee Collins

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1300 E. Marshall
St.; VCU Medical
Center Main Hospital,
1250 E. Marshall
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Shelley Edwards

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North Hospital,
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Margaret Guy

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1300 E. Marshall
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Ryan Haran

VCU Health,
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Philip Rizk

HCA Virginia,
HCA Henrico
Doctors' Hospital,
1602 Skipwith Road,
804-289-4500

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Gonzalo Bearman

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Ambulatory Care
Center, 417 N. 11th
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Megan Morales

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VCU Medical Center
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1250 E. Marshall St.,
804-828-2161

Julie E. Reznicek

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Center, 417 N. 11th
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Infectious Diseases
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Diane S. Sinnatamby

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bridge Road, Suite
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Center, 417 N. 11th
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Jahnke Road,
804-483-0000

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VCU Health, Ambula-
tory Care Center, 417
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CHOR (2467); Stony
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Stony Point Parkway,
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Feras Khan

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Kristin B. Miller

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latory Care Center,
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Vikas Pathak

Virginia Lung Clinic,
8243 Meadowbridge
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Sammy Pedram

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Bon Secours, Bon Secours West End Internal Medicine, 7001 Forest Ave., Suite 2500, 804-282-7857

Jeff Kushinka

VCU Health, Ambulatory Care Center, 417 N. 11th St., 804-828-9357

Bennett Lee

VCU Health, Ambulatory Care Center, 417 N. 11th St., 804-828-9357

Anand Lothe

Virginia Physicians, Inc., Innsbrook

Primary Care, 4900 Cox Road, Suite 150, Glen Allen, 804-346-1780

John Port

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HCA Virginia, Commonwealth Perinatal Services, 7601 Forest Ave., Suite 336, 804-289-4972; 1051 Johnston Willis Drive, Suite 110, 804-483-5862

Jessica DeMay

Virginia Women's Center, 12129 Graham Meadows Drive, 804-288-4084

Paul Hendrix

HCA Virginia, Commonwealth Perinatal Services, 7601 Forest Ave., Suite 336, 804-289-4972

Rodrick Love

HCA Virginia, Commonwealth Perinatal Services, 7601 Forest Ave., Suite 336, 804-289-4972

Ronald Ramus

VCU Health, Adult Outpatient Pavilion, 1001 E. Leigh St.; Stony Point 9105, 9105 Stony Point Drive, 804-828-4409

Edward Springel

VCU Health, Adult Outpatient Pavilion, 1001 E. Leigh St.; Stony Point 9105, 9105 Stony Point Drive, 804-828-4409

Micah Vaughn-Valencia

VCU Health, Adult Outpatient Pavilion, 1001 E. Leigh St.; Stony Point 9105,

9105 Stony Point Drive, 804-828-4409

NEONATAL/PERINATAL MEDICINE

Nayef Chahin

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Tower, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467); Ridgefield Medical, 2200 Pump Road, Suite 210, 804-740-1100; VCU Medical Center Critical Care Hospital, 1213 E. Clay St., 800-762-6161

Jenny Fox

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Karen Hendricks-Munoz

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Lynn Johnson

Pediatrics Neonatology of Virginia, 5801 Bremon Road, 804-282-8082

Joseph Khoury

VCU Health, VCU Medical Center Critical Care Hospital, 1213 E. Clay St., 804-828-9956

Russell Moores

VCU Health, VCU Medical Center Critical Care Hospital, 1213 E. Clay St., 804-828-9956

NEPHROLOGY

Todd Gehr

VCU Health, Adult Outpatient Pavilion, 1001 E. Leigh St.; Mayland Medical Center, 3470 Mayland Court, 804-828-2161

Ari Hirsch

Richmond Nephrology Associates, 671 Hioaks Road, Suite B, 804-673-2722

Jason Kidd

VCU Health, Mayland Medical Center, 3470 Mayland Court; Ambulatory Care Center, 417 N. 11th St., 804-828-2161

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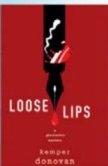
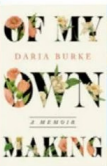
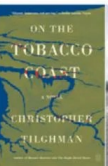
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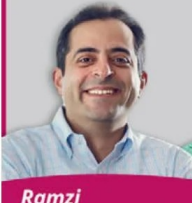

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Matthew Boyce
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VCU Health, Ambulatory Care Center, 417 N. 11th St., 804-828-9350
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Thomas Smith
Bon Secours, Bon Secours Neurology Clinic, 8266 Atlee Road, MOB II, Suite 330, Mechanicsville, 804-325-8720

Scott A. Vota
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Amelia Grover
VCU Health, VCU Massey Comprehensive Cancer Center, Adult Outpatient Pavilion, 1001 E. Leigh St.; Stony Point 9000, 9000 Stony Point Parkway; Mayland Medical Center, 3470 Mayland Court; 804-628-3111
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11958 W. Broad St.,
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Bon Secours, Bon
Secours Tuckahoe
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AND OTOLARYNGO-
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Building, 8700 Stony
Point Parkway,
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Laurence DiNardo
VCU Health, Adult
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1300 E. Marshall St.;
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Patrick Oley
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7650 E. Parham
Road, Suite 100,
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Benjamin G. Seeman
Integrative Pain
Specialists, 5901
West Broad St.,
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Broad St., 804-828-
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Bon Secours, Bon
Secours Palliative
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5855 Bremo Road,
MOB North, Suite
403, 804-288-
COPE (2673)
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Road, 804-281-8224
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Medical Center
Gateway Building,
1200 E. Marshall St.,
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Susan Roseff
VCU Health,
VCU Medical Center
Gateway Building,
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Kimberly Sanford
VCU Health,
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1200 E. Marshall St.,
804-828-7929
Steven Smith
VCU Health,
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Gateway Building,
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PEDIATRIC ADOLESCENT MEDICINE

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of Richmond at VCU,
Children's Pavilion,
1000 E. Broad St.,
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(2467); Mayland
Medical Center,
3470 Mayland Court,
804-527-4540

Nicole Karjane
VCU Health,
Stony Point 9105,
9105 Stony Point
Drive; Adult Out-
patient Pavilion,
1001 E. Leigh St.,
804-828-4409
An Pham
Children's Hospital
of Richmond at
VCU, Children's
Pavilion, 1000 E.
Broad St., 804-828-
CHOR (2467)
Bill Shaw
Children's Hospital
of Richmond at
VCU, Children's
Pavilion, 1000 E.
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Anne Marie Irani
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Santhosh Kumar
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of Richmond at VCU,
Children's Pavilion,
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Meadows, 6433
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Kelley Von Elten
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104, 804-285-5000
Wei Zhao
Children's Hospital of
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Kerri Carter
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of Richmond at
VCU, Children's
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Broad St., 804-
828-CHOR (2467)

PEDIATRIC EMERGENCY MEDICINE

Robin Foster

Children's Hospital
of Richmond at
VCU, Children's
Pavilion, 1000 E.
Broad St., 804-
828-CHOR (2467)

Chris Johnson

Bon Secours,
Bon Secours St.
Mary's Hospital,
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Ashley Litchfield

Children's Hospital
of Richmond at VCU,
Children's Tower

(Children's Emer-
gency Entrance),
1001 E. Marshall
St., 804-828-
CHOR (2467)

Frank Petruzella

Children's Hospital
of Richmond at VCU,
Children's Tower
(Children's Emer-
gency Entrance),
1001 E. Marshall
St., 804-828-
CHOR (2467)

Jonathan Silverman

Children's Hospital
of Richmond at VCU,
Children's Tower
(Children's Emer-
gency Entrance),
1001 E. Marshall
St., 804-828-
CHOR (2467)

PEDIATRIC ENDOCRINOLOGY

Sarah G. Hensley

Children's Hospital
of Richmond at VCU,
Children's Pavilion,
1000 E. Broad St.,
804-828-CHOR

(2467); Center for
Endocrinology,
Diabetes and
Metabolism, 2305
N. Parham Road,
Suite 1, 804-828-
CHOR (2467)

Bryce Nelson

Children's Hospital
of Richmond at VCU,
Children's Pavilion,
1000 E. Broad St.,
804-828-CHOR
(2467); Center
for Endocrinol-
ogy, Diabetes and
Metabolism, 2305
N. Parham Road,
Suite 1, 804-828-
CHOR (2467)

Mareen Thomas

Children's National
Hospital, Cardiology
Richmond, 7603
Forest Ave., Suite
401, 804-285-1611

Francis Tintani

Bon Secours, Bon
Secours Pediatric
Endocrinology and
Diabetes Associ-
ates, 5875 Bremono

Road, Suite 303,
804-281-8303

Edmond Wickham

Children's Hospital
of Richmond at VCU,
Children's Pavilion,
1000 E. Broad St.,
804-828-CHOR
(2467); Center
for Endocrinol-
ogy, Diabetes and
Metabolism, 2305
N. Parham Road,
Suite 1, 804-828-
CHOR (2467)

PEDIATRIC GAS- TROENTEROLOGY

Gisela Chelimsky

Children's Hospital
of Richmond at VCU,
Children's Pavilion,
1000 E. Broad St.,
804-828-CHOR
(2467); Short Pump
Pavilion, 11958 W.
Broad St., 804-
828-CHOR (2467)

Carl B. Rountree Jr.

Bon Secours, Bon
Secours Pediatric
Gastroenterology

Associates, 5855
Bremono Road, MOB
North, Suite 605,
804-281-8303

Praveen K.C.

Selvakumar
Bon Secours, Bon
Secours Pediatric
Gastroenterology
Associates, 5855
Bremono Road, MOB
North, Suite 605,
804-281-8303

Narendra Vadlamudi

Children's Hospital
of Richmond at VCU,
Children's Pavilion,
1000 E. Broad St.,
804-828-CHOR
(2467); Short Pump
Pavilion, 11958 W.
Broad St., 804-
828-CHOR (2467)

Juan Villalona

HCA Virginia, Pediat-
ric Gastroenterology
of Richmond, 7605
Forest Ave., Suite
316, 804-888-7337

PEDIATRIC HEMATOLOGY/ ONCOLOGY

Madhu Gowda

Children's Hospital
of Richmond at
VCU, Children's
Pavilion, 1000 E.
Broad St., 804-828-
CHOR (2467); VCU
Massey Comprehen-
sive Cancer Center,
1001 E. Leigh St.,
804-828-7999

Jordyn Griffin

Children's Hospital
of Richmond at VCU,
Children's Pavilion,
1000 E. Broad St.,
804-828-CHOR
(2467); VCU Massey
Comprehensive
Cancer Center,
1001 E. Leigh St.,
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of Richmond at VCU,
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India Y. Sisler

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467); VCU Massey Comprehensive Cancer Center, 1001 E. Leigh St., 804-828-7999

PEDIATRIC HOSPITALIST

Clifton C. Lee

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Tower,

1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

David Marcello

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Tower, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

Matthew Schefft

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Tower, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

Ashlie Tseng

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Tower, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

Allison Young

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Tower, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

PEDIATRIC INFECTIOUS DISEASE

David J. Friedel

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

William C. Koch

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

Suzanne R. Lavoie

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

Frances Saccocio

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

PEDIATRIC INTENSIVIST

Arif Alam

HCA Virginia, HCA Chippenham Hospital, Sheridan Children's Health-care, 7101 Jahnke Road, Suite 735, 804-483-2720

Kara Greenfield

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Tower, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

Mark Marinello

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Tower, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

Michael Miller

Bon Secours; Pediatrix Critical Care of Virginia, 5801 Bremono Road, 804-282-8082

Christopher Ray

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's

Tower, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

Duane C. Williams

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Tower, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

PEDIATRIC MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL

TIE Laura Caccavale

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Healthy Lifestyles Center, 2303 N. Parham Road, Suite 1, 804-828-CHOR (2467)

Jarrod Leffler

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Virginia Treatment Center for Children, 1308 Sherwood Ave., 800-762-6161

Melissa Nelson

Summit Emotional Health, 8921 Three Chopt Road, Suite 300, 804-562-6557

Parna Prajapati

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Virginia Treatment Center for Children, 1308 Sherwood Ave., 804-828-3129

Bela Sood

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Virginia Treatment Center for Children, 1308 Sherwood Ave., 804-828-3129

TIE Ekaterina

Stepanova

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Megan Lo
Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St.; Short Pump Pavilion, 11958 W. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

PEDIATRIC NEUROLOGY

Amy D. Harper
Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

Christopher Henry
Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

Monica Islam
Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

Donald Taylor
Pediatric Neurology Associates, 5875 Brems Road, MOB South, Suite 310, 804-288-9898

Ewa Way
Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

PEDIATRIC OTOLARYNGOLOGY

Kelley Dodson
Children's Hospital

of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467), Stony Point 9109, 9109 Stony Point Drive, 804-828-9000

Brian Fishero
Commonwealth Ear Nose and Throat Specialists, 1501 Maple Ave., Suite 205, 804-525-4231

Jin Lim
Virginia Ear Nose & Throat, 161 Wadsworth Drive, North Chesterfield, 804-484-3700

Rajanya S. Petersson
Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467), Stony Point 9109, 9109 Stony Point Drive, 804-828-9000

David Salley
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PEDIATRIC PULMONOLOGY

Andrew (Drew) Barber

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

Jonathan Ma
Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

Michael Schechter
Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

Judith Voynow
Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

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Chad Aarons
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Christopher K. Kim
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Victoria G. Kuester
Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St.; Stony Point 9000, 9000 Stony Point Drive, 804-828-CHOR (2467)

Olivier Rolin
Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

Bill Shaw
Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

PEDIATRIC SURGERY (GENERAL)

Charles Bagwell
Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

Laura A. Boomer
Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's

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Patricia Lange
 Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)
David A. Lanning
 Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

PEDIATRIC SURGICAL SPECIALIST

Laura A. Boomer
 Children's Hospital of Richmond at

VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)
Brian Kogon
 Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)
David A. Lanning
 Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)
Jennifer Rhodes
 Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467); Stony Point 9109, 9109 Stony Point Drive, 804-828-9000
Hans R. Tuten
 Bon Secours, Bon Secours Tuckahoe

Orthopedics, 1501 Maple Ave., Suite 200; 8220 Meadowbridge Road, Suite 202, Mechanicsville; 3400 Haydenpark Lane, Suite 100, Henrico, 804-285-2300
Gary Tye
 Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

PEDIATRIC UROLOGY

John Edmondson
 Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467); Stony Point Medical Office Building, 8700 Stony Point Parkway, 804-272-2411
Tony Herndon
 Children's Hospital

of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467); Stony Point Medical Office Building, 8700 Stony Point Parkway, 804-272-2411
Eric Nelson
 Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467); Stony Point Medical Office Building, 8700 Stony Point Parkway, 804-272-2411
Rebecca Zee
 Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467); Stony Point Medical Office Building, 8700 Stony Point Parkway, 804-272-2411; Short

Pump Pavilion, 11958 W. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

PEDIATRICS (CHILD ABUSE)

Robin Foster
 Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

PEDIATRICS (GENERAL)

Melani de Silva
 RVA Pediatrics, 10410 Ridgefield Parkway, 804-754-3776; 7000 Patterson Ave., 804-282-9706; 14400 Sommerville Court, Midlothian, 804-379-5437
Cole Hawthorne
 RVA Pediatrics, 10410 Ridgefield Parkway, 804-754-3776;

7000 Patterson Ave., 804-282-9706; 14400 Sommerville Court, Midlothian, 804-379-5437
Tiffany Kimbrough
 Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)
Sean McKenna
 Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)
N. Romesh Wijesooriya
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Richmond, VA 23233
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Richmond, VA 23225
804.320.2751

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VCU Health, Short Pump Pavilion, 11958 W. Broad St., Henrico, 804-828-0713

William Carter

VCU Health, Ambulatory Care Center, 417 N. 11th St., 800-762-6161

Aaron Jones

Virginia Rehab Physicians, 2420 Maplewood Ave., Suite G, 804-220-5770

Eugenio A. Monasterio

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

Olivier Rolin

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E.

Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

PLASTIC/COSMETIC SURGERY

Sharline Aboutanos

Richmond Plastic Surgeons, 1630 Wilkes Ridge Parkway, Suite 201, 804-585-3420

Nadia Blanchet

Nadia Blanchet, 9210 Forest Hill Ave., Suite B-1, 804-320-8545

Darrin Hubert

Richmond Plastic Surgeons, 14401 Sommerville Court, Suite 1A, Midlothian, 804-585-3420

Jennifer Rhodes

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467); Stony Point 9109, 9109 Stony Point Drive, 804-828-9000

William Schleicher

Skin Surgery Center of

Virginia, 2510 Gaskins Road, Suite A, Henrico, 804-282-4940

Neil Zimmel

Richmond Aesthetic Surgery, 11934 W. Broad St., Suite 200, 804-729-5588

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Sharline Aboutanos

Richmond Plastic Surgeons, 1630 Wilkes Ridge Parkway, Suite 201, 804-585-3420

Nadia Blanchet

Nadia Blanchet, 9210 Forest Hill Ave., Suite B-1, 804-320-8545

Michael Feldman

VCU Health, VCU Medical Center Critical Care Hospital, 1213 E. Clay St.; Stony Point 9109, 9109 Stony Point Drive, 804-828-3060

Darrin Hubert

Richmond Plastic

Surgeons, 14401 Sommerville Court, Suite 1A, Midlothian, 804-585-3420

Jennifer Rhodes

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467); Stony Point 9109, 9109 Stony Point Drive, 804-828-9000

William Schleicher

Skin Surgery Center of Virginia, 2510 Gaskins Road, Suite A, Henrico, 804-282-4940

Isaac Wornom

Richmond Plastic Surgeons, 1630 Wilkes Ridge Parkway, Suite 201, 804-585-3420

PODIATRY

John J.

Kadukammakal

Virginia Foot & Ankle Center, 2008 Bremon

road, Suite 100; 8239 Meadowbridge Road, Suite D, Mechanicsville, 804-285-3933

Justin Phillingane

MedRVA Podiatry, 40 Medical Park Blvd., Suite A, Petersburg, 804-732-6000

James E. Shadbolt

Capital Foot Care, 2200 Pump Road, Suite 227, Henrico, 804-754-7400

TIE Scott T. Vantre

Virginia Foot & Ankle Center, 2008 Bremon Road, Suite 100; 8239 Meadowbridge Road, Suite D, Mechanicsville, 804-285-3933

Ryan Vazales

Advanced Foot & Ankle of Virginia, 2569 Homeview Drive, Henrico, 804-390-9878

Emily Wehman

VCU Health, Adult Outpatient Pavilion, 1001 E. Leigh St.; Stony Point 9000, 9000 Stony Point Parkway, 804-828-7069

TIE David T. Weiss

West End Foot & Ankle, 7650 Parham Road, Suite 215, 804-346-1779

PSYCHIATRY (ADULT)

Melissa Bui

VCU Health, VCU Medical Center West Hospital, 1200 E. Broad St., 804-828-2000

Martin N. Buxton

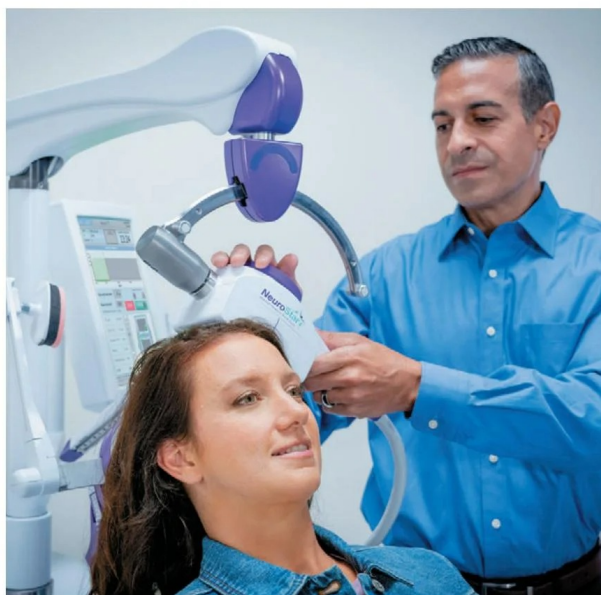
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Thornton B. Lambert, CPNP-PC, IBCLC
Ann Wallace Blair, PA-C
Kathryn L. Golay, CPNP-PC
Lauren Bailey, FNP-C
Tammy Rockwell, BSN, R.N., IBCLC



**Dibya Subedi,
MD, FAAP, CLC**

Dr. Subedi is a graduate from the University of Pittsburgh, where she received a Bachelor of Science in Neuroscience (Summa Cum Laude). She completed her medical degree from The University of Virginia, and her pediatric residency at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.



**Nicole G. Byram,
MD, FAAP**

Dr. Byram graduated from University of Richmond with a Bachelor of Science in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (Minor in Mathematics, Summa Cum Laude, departmental honors, Phi Beta Kappa). She then earned her medical degree from and completed her pediatric residency (primary care track) at The University of Virginia School of Medicine.



**Matthew Van de Graaf,
MD**

Dr. Matt Van de Graaf is a Virginia native who studied Biomedical Engineering at the University of Virginia then medical school at Eastern Virginia Medical School where he was inducted into both the Gold Humanism Honor Society & the Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Society in his final year. He is finishing his residency at Children's National Hospital and will be joining the group this summer.

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Edgar Rodas

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SURGERY (UROLOGY AND UROLOGICAL)

Sundee Deorah

Virginia Urology, 6900 Forest Ave., Suite 200; 1700 Mills Road, Suite B, Goochland, 804-330-9105

Lance Hampton

VCU Health, Adult Outpatient Pavilion, 1001 E. Leigh St., 804-828-7999

Adam Klausner

VCU Health, Stony

Point 9105, 9105 Stony Point Drive; Adult Outpatient Pavilion, 1001 E. Leigh St., 804-323-1180

Kinloch Nelson

Virginia Urology, 8152 Pleasant Grove Road, Mechanicsville; 9101 Stony Point Drive, 804-330-9105

Jeff Rebman

Urology Associates of Richmond, 1401 Johnston Willis Drive, Suite 4500, 804-320-1355

SURGERY (VASCULAR)

Michael Amendola

Richmond VA Medical Center, 1201 Broad Rock Blvd., 804-675-5000

Andrew Leake

Vascular Surgery Associates, 7900 Shrader Road, Henrico,

804-288-1953

Mark Levy

VCU Health Pauley Heart Center, Ambulatory Care Center, 417 N. 11th St.; Waterside Commons, 2035 Waterside Road, Suite 100, Prince George, 804-828-7749

Avik Mukherjee

Vascular Surgery Associates, 7900 Shrader Road, Henrico, 804-288-1953

Daniel Newton

VCU Health Pauley Heart Center, Ambulatory Care Center, 417 N. 11th St.; Stony Point 9000, 9000 Stony Point Parkway; Waterside Commons, 2035 Waterside Road, Suite 100, Prince George; Tappahannock Pavilion A, 659 Hospital Road, Tappahannock, 804-828-7749

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Ashley Carroll

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Nathan L. Guerette

Intimate Wellness Institute of Virginia, 2931 Polo Parkway, Midlothian, 804-523-2533

Megan B. Shannon

Virginia Women's Center, 12129 Graham Meadows Drive; 7515 Right Flank Road, Mechanicsville; 6600 W. Broad St., 804-288-4084

Tovia Smith

Virginia Women's Center, 12129 Graham Meadows Drive; 7515 Right Flank Road, Mechanicsville; 6600 W. Broad St., 804-288-4084

RELATED MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS: NICU NURSE

Mary Barry

Children's Hospital of Richmond at

VCU, VCU Medical Center Critical Care Hospital, 1213 E. Clay St., 804-828-9956

Jamie Burton

VCU Health, VCU Medical Center Critical Care Hospital, 1213 E. Clay St., 800-762-6161

Melissa Dollings

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, VCU Medical Center Critical Care Hospital, 1213 E. Clay St., 800-762-6161

RELATED MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS: NURSE ANESTHESIOLOGIST

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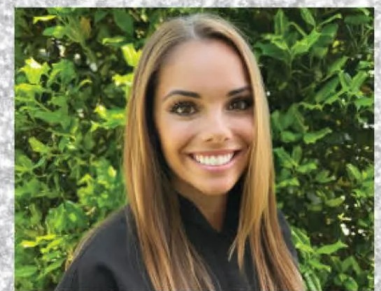
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Mary Ford

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Ashley Stigall

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467); Children's Tower, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467); Adult Outpatient Pavilion, 1001 E. Leigh St., 800-762-6161

RELATED MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS: NURSE ONCOLOGIST

Ann Schoeneweis
Bon Secours, Bon

Secours St. Francis Hematology Oncology, 13710 St. Francis Blvd., Midlothian, 804-594-7300

Lee Ann Skinner

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

RELATED MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS: NURSE PRACTITIONER

Thomas Brunner

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

Krystle Brunson

VCU Health, VCU Medical Center North Hospital, 1300 E. Marshall St., 804-828-2161

Timothy Ford

VCU Health, VCU Medical Center North Hospital, 1300 E. Marshall St., 804-828-7929

Megan Gosnell

VCU Health, VCU Medical Center North Hospital, 1300 E. Marshall St., 804-828-2161

Hollie Jones

Virginia Physicians for Women, 1775 Lake Harley Drive, Prince George; 13801 St. Francis Blvd., Suite 150, Midlothian, 804-897-2100

RELATED MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS: PHARMACIST

Lauren Magee

VCU Health, VCU Health Center Main Hospital, 1250 E. Marshall St., 804-828-2161

Sandra Mitchell

VCU Health, Virginia Treatment Center for Children, 1308 Sherwood Ave., 800-762-6161

Cady P. Noda

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Tower, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

Dale Marie Vaughan

VCU Health, VCU Health Center Main Hospital, 1250 E. Marshall St., 804-828-2161

Idris Yakubu

VCU Health Hume-Lee Transplant Center, VCU Medical Center Gateway Building, 1200 E. Marshall St., 804-828-4104

RELATED MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS: PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT

Brian Cromer

VCU Health, VCU Medical Center North Hospital, 1300 E. Marshall St., 800-762-6161

Sarah Hamaker

VCU Health, VCU Medical Center North Hospital, 1300 E. Marshall St., 800-762-6161

Stephanie Joyce

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Jennifer Newlin

Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, Children's Pavilion, 1000 E. Broad St., 804-828-CHOR (2467)

Deron Page

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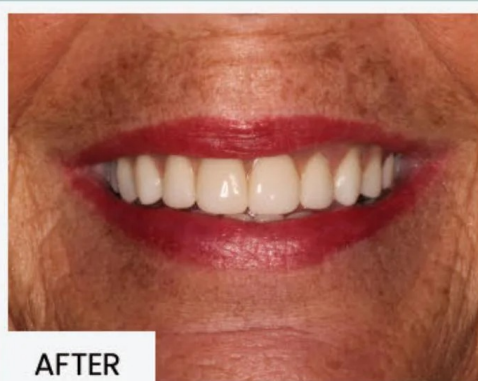
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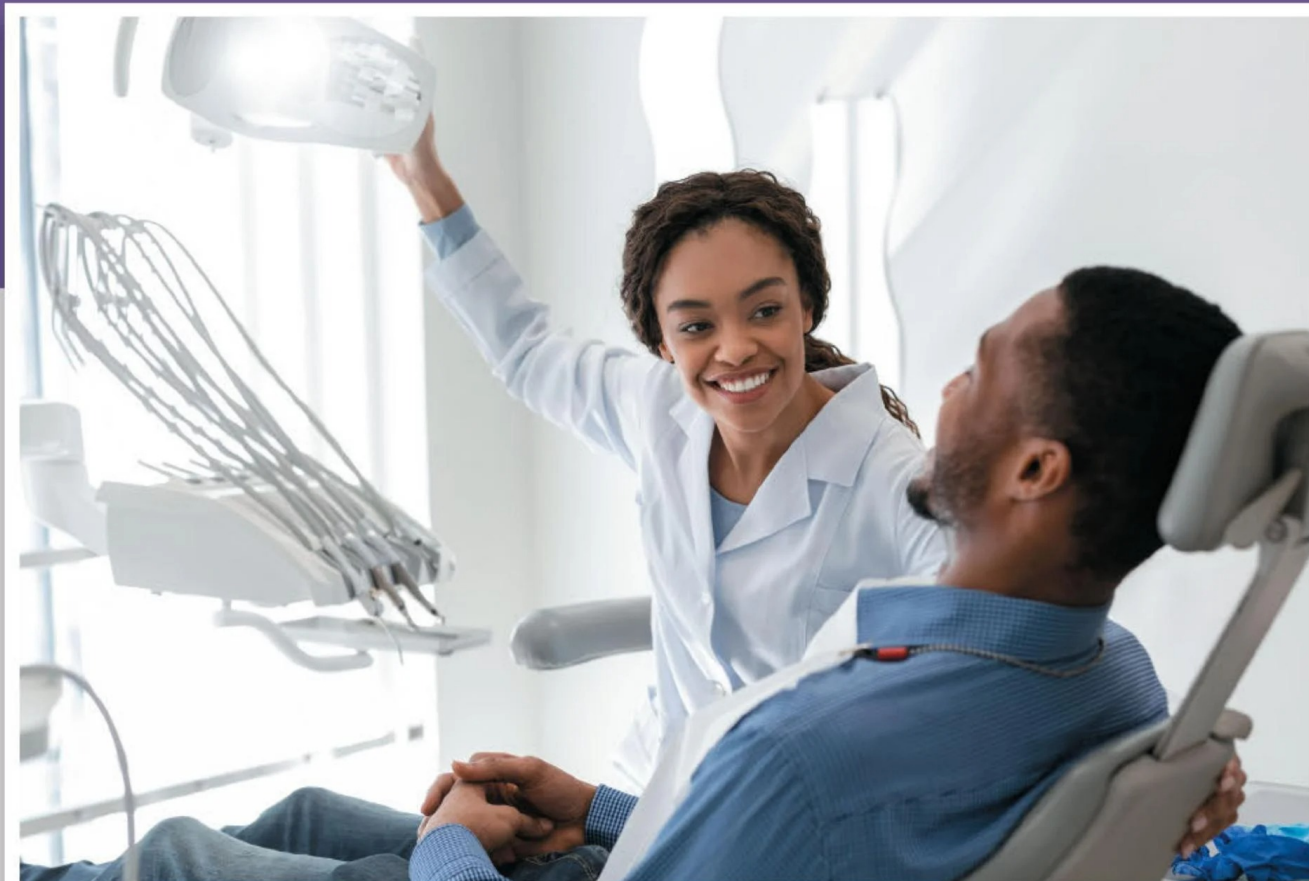
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EAT & DRINK



Vegetarian mushroom cavatelli
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JAY PAUL

Spring into
the season
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An RVA cocktail
connoisseur
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Big moves for Big
Herm's alum
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Celery is a savory
star in drinks
P. 138

The city's first
omakase counter
P. 140

Edited by EILEEN MELLON

ROUNDUP

FIELD GUIDE

Celebrate spring with delectable seasonal delicacies

By Genevelyn Steele

With the arrival of spring comes its bountiful supply of fleeting foods. We've tracked down the restaurants, markets and farmers offering a taste of Virginia, including ingredients sourced from local waterways and fields.

SOFT-SHELL CRABS

After the Atlantic blue crab sheds its hard shell, the crustacean is almost a third larger. Catch them while you can: The shells wrapping fleecy, sweet meat are pliable for mere hours before their protective outside begins to harden again. Net softies from May to September, when warm water triggers shedding.

At multilocation **Latitude Seafood Co.**, the crew batters and deep-fries whale-sized soft-shells for their seasonal two-hander sandwiches.

Lillie Pearl tunes up a heated chorus via its Nashville-seasoned soft-shell crab sandwich, which doesn't skimp on the accoutrements: ranch slaw, spicy ranch dressing and pickles.

At Vietnamese stalwart **Mekong**, softies are fried crispy, then gently glazed with either a ginger-scallion or sweet-and-sour tamarind sauce. Grab a beer to wash them down.

Home cooks on the hunt for pristine soft-shells should navigate to **Bon Air Seafood**, where the counter staff can guide you to the appropriate size and shell texture, from the barely there, paper-thin-shelled crabs to more toothsome options.



Nashville-seasoned soft-shell crab sandwich from Lillie Pearl



Bacon-wrapped shad roe with anchovy butter, capers and lemon

SHAD ROE

Shad migrate to fresh water to spawn in the spring. Their eggs are a luxurious, salty oceanic treat that is as short-lived, and as buttery on the lips, as an illicit meetup. Secure that roe while it's hot.

Shoreline Seafood Market chef Josh Loeb wraps shad roe with bacon before marching it into the pan with anchovy butter, lemon and capers.

Mamma Zu's legendary shad roe spiedini lives on at **Edo's Squid**, where sets of the southern caviar are cleaned, dredged in flour, pan-fried in butter and capers, then served with lemony field greens.

Follow the shad's Atlantic peregrinations to **Tuckahoe Seafood**, where the unctuous sea caviar will be available in early April. Pro-tip: Top it with pork belly before pan-frying and serving with lacy, runny eggs cooked in the drippings.

RAMPS

Long before they became a trendy farmers market find, wild ramps signaled spring in Southwest Virginia. The estimable Virginia-raised chef Edna Lewis referred to the pungent, leafy allium she grew up foraging as a tonic after a winter spent devoid of homegrown lettuces.

Carytown's small-batch sausage bistro, **The Mayor**, mixes its links seasonally, bulking up sustainably sourced, in-house butchered meats with a hangover-curing amount of the onion-scented wild leeks.

Dinamo takes a comforting approach to the ramp, grinding it into pesto and stirring the sharply oily, nutty spread into pillowy gnocchi—one of the eatery's most sought-after and dreamt-of dishes.

At daytime deli **Charlotte's**, chewy wontons are wrapped around fresh ramps, which perfume the broth of chef and co-owner Nikki Gregory's springy wonton soup.

Though the season for ramps is short, **Lindera Farms** preserves the bracing bite of the wild onion in its ramp vinegar, which is available online. It makes a randy addition to a bloody mary.





Braised rabbit gnudi with spring peas and wild maitake, oyster and chanterelle mushrooms from Revel.



PEAS

Another verdant sign of spring, peas come in all shapes and sizes, from the swirling tendrils of fresh pea shoots to the starchy centers of baby English peas.

Thirty-year-old favorite **Full Kee** takes a Cantonese approach to pea shoots, first steaming and then stir-frying them. The result is a spinach-meets-snow-pea creation bursting with garlic and a hint of ginger.

The Prodigal Son cocktail at **Heritage** is a garden in a glass, with snap pea matcha pulling crisp, herby notes.

Lakeside hangout **Hobnob** makes a substantial vegetarian mushroom cavatelli with English peas that knocks primavera to its knees.

On Patterson Avenue, **Shoreline Seafood Market** marries king salmon, spring peas, smoked onion soubise, tangy caramelized cippolinis and Texas tarragon for a seafood sister wife of delicacies.

ASPARAGUS

Local asparagus harvested in April and May has softer stalks and manifests a vegetal depth of flavor straight from the garden of eating. It's a companion plant to strawberries that proliferate in late April.

Grisette chef-owner Donnie Glass knows that silky egg textures complement asparagus. The restaurant's asparagus gribiche is a madame-approved combo of chopped eggs, capers, cornichons, herbs, lemon, Dijon and olive oil atop cooked asparagus.

Asparagus goat cheese galettes with balsamic glaze are a flaky treat featuring local stalks at Union Hill's **Fat Rabbit**.

River City Bakery offers quiche with asparagus and almond-strawberry tarts using produce from AgriBerry Farms. Discover its ephemeral treats at the Pizza Bones Spring Market on April 27, alongside strawberry-chocolate cake, and at Bird-house Farmers Market starting in May.

Fill your basket with asparagus bundles from Manakintowne Specialty Growers via **Little House Green Grocery**, where fresh strawberries and ramps will also be on deck. The Bellevue market hopes to have house-made ramp pasta and ramp salt on the shelves this year, too.



WILD MUSHROOMS

Wild mushroom hunting can be fickle, resulting in either a feast of the senses or a famine on the plate. These establishments are sure things when it comes to procuring meaty, umami-rich fungi.

Revel unlocks the 'shroom badge with braised rabbit gnudi: That's ricotta dumplings bedecked with spring peas and wild maitake, oyster and chanterelle mushrooms.

Farmer and mushroom man **Steve Haas** vends black trumpets and chicken of the woods at the Farmers Market at St. Stephen's through May, while June brings forth meaty chanterelles and morels.

Yellow Umbrella Provisions scores its chanterelles from a teacher at St. Christopher's School, who hunts them with his son. The grocer is also a reliable source for soft-shells and shad roe, and they make one heck of a soft-shell sandwich.

Recently opened pizza spot **BrickFire** tops its hand-stretched dough with bechamel and a blend of Asiago and provolone before piling on wood-oven-baked wild mushrooms, pickled Fresno chiles, and a generous dusting of pecorino and olive oil. **R**



EAT&DRINK

AROUND TOWN

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Dishes we can't stop dreaming about

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\$8 at Nokoribi, 1509 Belleville St.

Richmond's own izakaya (Japanese pub), inside The Veil Brewing Co. in Scott's Addition, is a reliable source for creative and comforting small plates. This flavorful, healthy salad is a magenta-hued study in contrasts: sweetness from beets, a tangy pucker from fermented cabbage and grated carrots, and the satisfying snap of toasted garlic from Nokoribi's house-made chili crisp. —*Mandy Loy*

FALAFEL

\$4.85 side, \$13.25 bowl at Soul N' Vinegar, 2910 Q St.

This East End all-day cafe doesn't get enough credit for its house-made selections and relaxed atmosphere. While I'm a huge fan of the chopped chicken verde sandwich and the hot roast beef sandwich with collard greens, their falafel is a must. A perfect snacky option or the star of a bowl or wrap, the crisped, herby rounds are at their best accompanied by Soul N' Vinegar's bright and zesty green sauce. —*Eileen Mellon*

WHITE CHEDDAR BURGER

\$16 at Bar West, 5811 Grove Ave.

I found myself in a bit of a conundrum on a recent excursion to this eatery near Libbie and Grove avenues. Several of the sandwich options appealed to me (including the pulled pork grilled cheese and the prosciutto with fig jam), but the white cheddar burger won the battle thanks to one ingredient: roasted garlic aioli, the perfect pungent spread for the juicy beef patty on a fluffy bun. I'm a sucker for garlic, and this did not disappoint. —*Nicole Cohen*



EVENT PICKS

Explore a fortified wine with historical ties during a **MADEIRA TASTING EVENT** on April 10 at the Virginia Museum of History & Culture, held in partnership with Common House and local wine expert Bartholomew Broadbent.

HENRICO RESTAURANT WEEK

is back April 28-May 4. Dine at participating spots and enjoy a prix fixe two-course lunch or three-course dinner. A portion of proceeds from each meal benefits local nonprofit Safe Harbor.

REMEMBER THAT PLACE?

GALAXY DINER



Galaxy Diner owners Rebecca Cherry and James Henderson

Hot and new can steal the spotlight, but what about longstanding local favorites? Each month, we'll visit a Richmond-area restaurant that has been in business 15 years or longer.

Richmond knows what makes a good diner. That's certainly what the cooking site Taste of Home discovered last year when they named Carytown's space-themed, approachable mainstay, Galaxy Diner, the best in the state. After three decades in business, what's the secret sauce?

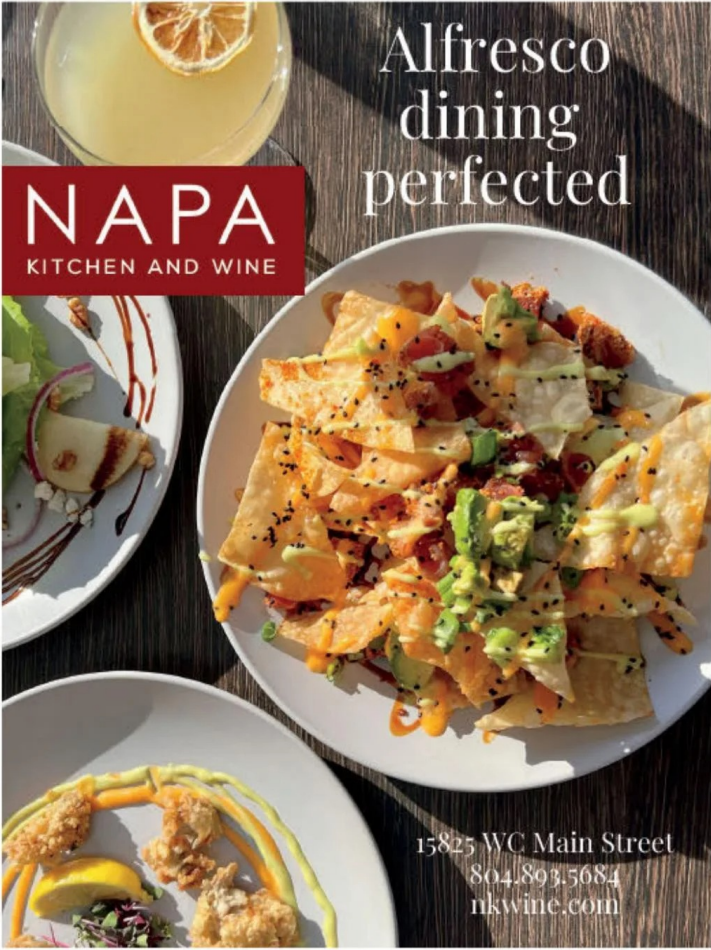
"It's the sense of community," Galaxy Diner owner Rebecca Cherry says.

When the original owner of Galaxy Diner, Michael Pace, retired in 2022, Cherry took over as general manager. The following year, along with her husband, James Henderson (whom she met when she first started working at the diner in 2010), she purchased the restaurant from Pace.

"It was my first restaurant job. I was in my early 20s, shy and reserved, and I feel like this job really helped me break out of my shell," she says. While Cherry held other gigs, she says, "I just would always come back."

Many of the staff have been with Galaxy Diner for at least 15 years, and similarly, the concept of the business, complete with its retro tabletops and red spinning bar stools, has remained consistent. The Carytown building has existed as a diner virtually since its beginning. Dishes such as the "Knock Me Up Scotty," a plate featuring fried pickles and ranch dressing with a hard-boiled egg and scoop of ice cream on the side, have been on the menu nearly as long. As for customer favorites, Cherry says, the Nuclear Waste Dog is a classic, as are their milkshakes, which come served in a metal tin.

"We've had people come in here and tell me this is the first place they came to when they moved here; we've had people tell us it was their first date here, and now they're married with kids," Cherry says. "That's one of the reasons I love it, too, because it's kind of like an old-school diner." —*Matthew Sporn*



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SPOTLIGHT

BETH DIXON

The cocktail queen and beverage consultant chats about her new space and favorite things

By Eileen Mellon



GIRL BOSS

"I founded Salt + Acid [a beverage consulting biz] in October 2020. I love being able to work for myself and hire my talented friends to curate and work fun events. My brick-and-mortar (Studio One Twenty, shared with Marble Moon Interiors) is going to help me expand my business."



FRIDGE ESSENTIALS

"A large variety of cheeses, Duke's Mayo, Lao Gan Ma chili crisp and tequila."



NO. 1 INGREDIENTS

"Aromatized wines add so much depth and backbone to cocktails and are also delicious as a spritz or on-the-rocks pour with a twist of citrus. I've also been gravitating toward passion fruit; it's funky and fruity with just the right amount of tartness."



SIGNATURE SIP

"Lately, passion fruit Negronis made with Chinola. My most well-known drink is probably the Bermuda Hundred, which I created for Pasture. It's a mixture of gin, Campari, pineapple, orgeat and lime."



THROUGH THE SPEAKERS

"Lately, it's been a lot of Doechii and Lola Young (sometimes I am influenced by my teenage daughter). I have a soft spot for '60s country like Loretta Lynn, Patsy Cline and Dolly Parton. If you have ever closed a bar with me, you know I exclusively like to clean to Trick Daddy."



SPARE TIME

"In the past few years, I've really gotten into mycology and foraging for wild mushrooms. I also spend entirely too much time watching and listening to true crime shows."

CLOCKWISE FROM CENTER: ILLUSTRATION BY ABBY GIUSEPPE; BETH DIXON; LINDA XIAO; WIKIMEDIA COMMONS; ADOBE STOCK

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Q&A

'GIVE OPPORTUNITIES'

A Big Herm's Kitchen alumna takes over the catering side of the business *By Bird Cox*

Known for its lovingly sized portions and friendly crew, Big Herm's Kitchen connected a community of comfort food lovers over its nearly 20 years in Jackson Ward and on Brookland Park Boulevard. While the eatery shuttered in late 2024, the business will continue as a catering company under the guidance of longtime employee Leanne Fletcher. Her specialty is desserts, so expect a few new treats to pop up on the menu beyond Fletcher's signature peach bread pudding, which is also a customer favorite.

Richmond magazine: How'd you get started at Big Herm's?

Leanne Fletcher: I knew [Herman "Big Herm" Baskerville's] family, his mom and his sister. I was really close with his sister. When I became a single mom of two kids, I needed a job that allowed me to be at home and to work while they were in school. I started as a delivery driver for breakfast and lunch at Herm's, and when he

opened the store on Second Street, I ran the cash register there; I did whatever needed to be done. His sister was doing the catering side of things. Eventually, though, she had two kids of her own, and she was like, ... "I need to transfer this over," so I got involved in that part. I've been catering for about six years now.

“

I'm making the transition with the people who love us in mind.

—Leanne Fletcher

RM: Big Herm's has shifted entirely to catering; tell us about that transition.

Fletcher: Yes, we closed the [restaurant], and I'm making the transition with the people who love us in mind. I'm using Big Herm's recipes, but there will be things that I'll add. Tiramisu, regular and gluten-free; it's a big hit. And more desserts, like strawberry cakes and cupcakes. It will be more streamlined, with the vegan and vegetarian options highlighted. I'm trying to keep the good food, the comfort food that was established, in play — that feels important. People were like, "Where will I get my catfish and peach bread pudding?" And I can do much of that through the catering side. Not everything, but most things.

RM: You grew up cooking in Hanover. What are some experiences from your younger years that influenced the chef you are today?

Fletcher: I'm more on the baking side because I baked with my grandmother. I still have some of her recipes. We were on a farm, so we went to the store for meat and milk, but other than that, we grew our food and cooked it. Apples for applesauce, grapes for jelly — I had a bucket of butter beans to shell every night with my homework. I grew up around food. If you didn't contribute to the garden or in the kitchen, you didn't get fed. That was part of the upbringing.

RM: What do you love about catering events?

Fletcher: Other than the chaos? [Laughs] I love the diversity. You can do anything from just appetizers to full meals to desserts — the diversity in foods, and the diversity in the type of people you meet. Baby showers, funerals. Basketball events. You meet so many different kinds of people, and it's great.

RM: What advice would you give to others in the food industry?

Fletcher: Give opportunities to people. I was fortunate that, with Big Herm, not only did he employ me, but both of my kids. They worked on catering events in the summertime, and it helped them enter the real world. Opportunities are important. 

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

JAY PAUL

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SCAN FOR OUR LATEST DEALS →



5 FAVES

TORPEDO TIME

A staple of Vietnamese street food, banh mi sandwiches are handheld heaven

By Genevelyn Steele



1 Roasted Pork Belly Banh Mi

\$9 at The Pho Spot

Filled with craggy bites of roasted pork belly, The Pho Spot's fluffy baguette comes picnic ready if ordered to go. While the roll is slathered with a mayo-butter spread and piled with meat, the pickled radish and carrot, cilantro, jalapeno, cucumber slivers, and extra special house sauce are all wrapped individually, ensuring the sandwich doesn't get soggy during transport. Find this fast-casual takeout counter in the Lotte Plaza Market food court, along with a half-dozen other Asian eateries.

OPEN TAB

Stalk to Me

Celery is a star player in spring cocktails



Thi Rak

THE FRESH, VEGETAL FLAVOR of celery makes for a transcendent cocktail ingredient, especially when the weather gets warmer and you're refreshed by the smells of cut grass and seedlings popping up through the fragrant earth. Celery can be juiced, combined with sugar into a saccharum syrup, infused into bitters or dunked raw into a bloody mary and munched. Here are a handful of fun sips around the city that celebrate celery.

Touch Grass at The Jasper

Dutch gin backs up delicious greenery in this enlivening beauty: basil brandy, grapefruit, fennel, lemon, parsley and — of course — celery, plus a bit of cognac and Manzanilla sherry to smooth the edges. Bright, exciting and expertly balanced.

2 Spicy Vegan BBQ Banh Mi

\$15 at Fat Kid Sandwiches

Known for its footlong subs, Fat Kid serves up a vegan banh mi whose size lives up to that reputation. Planks of tofu are marinated for 24 hours, then chunked, crisped and topped with a veggie board of house-pickled mushrooms, daikon and carrot; fresh scallions; and herbs. An aromatic red curry peanut sauce bumps up the umami level to a decadent 10 on the flavor meter. Owners Jon Martin and Liz Clifford plan to open a brick-and-mortar shop in the city's financial district soon.

3 Grilled Chicken Banh Mi

\$8.99 at Pho 60

Oftentimes, you don't want an oversized sandwich at lunch, and that's where a traditionally sized banh mi comes into play. This Midlothian Turnpike pho spot has a long pedigree — its owner started the original Pho So 1 in the Tan-A Plaza shopping center over two decades ago. Since she opened Pho 60 with some of her original staff, business has exploded. The grilled chicken breast banh mi, painted with fish sauce and scented with lemongrass, is just one of the reasons it can be hard to score a table during peak lunch hours.

4 Banh Mi

\$15 with fries and broth, \$10 sandwich only at Pho Luca's

Pho Luca's shiny hoagie roll is dense and chewy, rather than light and fluffy, otherwise its unctuous fillings would disintegrate the loaf. The restaurant's traditional version of the sandwich is weighed down by pork sausage, pork belly and pate, with fresh jalapeno slices brightening the side of steak-cut fries served with peppery yum yum dip. The accompanying bowl of pho broth, decked with green onions, helps temper the rich flavors.

5 Bulgogi Banh Mi

\$9.25 at 88 Street Food

88 Street Food's bulgogi beef is savory-sweet, soy sauce-tinged sirloin, wrapped up in an airy roll with the banh mi trinity: pickled carrot and daikon and long, thin spears of fresh cucumber that fit the baguette. What makes this dine-in restaurant from the proprietors of Vietnam One stand out are its add-ons, including fried egg, extra meat or pate, for eaters wanting to trick out their subs.

La Chica Fresa at Lolita's

Funky rums! Bergamot! A romantic wedding of strawberry and celery! This is bound to be a spring favorite, with tropical notes from clarified coconut milk carrying it right into the summer. Tangy lemon puts the flavor profile in the daiquiri zone.

Thi Rak at My Noodle & Bar

Behold, one of the smoothest slurps in the city. The celery flavor in this gem-colored cocktail is softened, fluffed up and sweetened (but not overly) by egg white, honey and velvet falernum, and accented with toasty pandan extract. There is Belle Isle Moonshine in there somewhere, but its big muscles are hidden beneath the marshmallow pump cover.

—Bird Cox



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BY EILEEN MELLON

PERSPECTIVE

In Good Hands

A Richmond sushi spot offers a chef's-choice experience

On a recent Friday night, an intimate group of diners waits excitedly at Nami, a Japanese eatery at 218 E. Main St. in the former Third Street Diner space. On the agenda: Experiencing a 13-course chef-curated tasting, or omakase, which translates as “I leave the details up to you.”

Richmond isn't necessarily synonymous with high-grade sushi. The question of where diners should head for the freshest nigiri or slice of sashimi typically leads to answers like “Washington, D.C.” or “save that for New York City.” Nami, Richmond's first dedicated spot to offer omakase, hopes to change that perception.

Opened in 2022, the restaurant is helmed by chef-owner Tao Chen and his wife, Song Li, who decorated the interiors. In December, the duo converted the second level of their business into an intimate omakase lounge.

At 6:15 p.m., Li leads diners upstairs into a tiny sushi den. The meal begins with the presentation of a sensuous oyster, a Japanese Kumamoto that is cool and pleasantly sweet, like a refreshing slice of melon on a summer day.

Next, a small bowl swimming with three delicate baby scallops gently swaddled in uni (sea urchin roe) appears. The ingredients come together seamlessly, creating a custardy, luscious bite that's gone so quickly it's as if it never happened.

While omakase is known for being interactive, Chen remains focused, and I get the impression the chef would rather



The chef-owner of Nami, Tao Chen

let his sushi do the talking. But watching him, it's clear he is a master in methodical movements. It's easy to sit back and become entranced as he scoops portions of rice, placing them between his hands and patting them back and forth, shaping them with long-practiced motions.

Chen, 29, grew up on the southern coast of China, with Taiwan visible from his homeland. His father owned a sea cucumber farm, and when Chen was young, he ate fish plucked straight from the sea daily.

Upon graduating high school, Chen went to Japan, where he had his first foray with omakase. He became infatuated. Initially moving to New York for college, he quickly found himself drawn to its kitchens instead. There, he also gained a mentor, a former Nobu chef who had worked for the acclaimed Japanese restaurant, which has outposts across the globe, for a decade.

In 2018, Chen relocated to Richmond. That same year, Li came to Richmond from China to study art education at Virginia Commonwealth University. The pair met while working at another sushi restaurant. When Chen's mentor

encouraged him to start a venture of his own, they took the leap.

Regarding her husband's dedication, Li says, “Daily life is sushi. Work is sushi. After work is sushi.” She describes him as responsible and passionate.

Throughout the evening, each course is an adventure. On this night, diners are met with mackerel topped with soy truffle, striped jade accented with a green onion soy sauce, amberjack laden with wasabi salsa, blue fin tuna with a touch of truffle, torched king salmon with yuzu and dry miso, shrimp with caviar and wasabi soy, red seabream, and A5 wagyu beef.

Li says sourcing was initially a challenge, but they have connected with a purveyor and are focused on importing high-quality fish and maintaining reasonable prices. With the omakase experience booked for weeks out, it seems this is a moment Richmond diners have been waiting for.

“I thought that not a lot of people know about omakase, but most of them know, and they really love it,” Li says.

Reservations (\$85 per person) are required for omakase service at Nami. R

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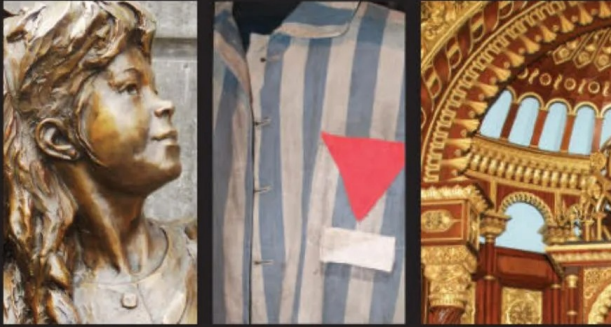


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PARTING SHOT



Alice Langford and
her daughter Martha

ONE-HUNDRED-AND-TEN-YEAR-OLD Alice Langford, who lives in the Near West End house she has called home since 1956, says she recalls happy times growing up, despite moving often.

"My father was a Baptist minister and a weaver in a cotton mill. We moved around a lot depending on where my dad's job was in Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia," says Langford, the third of five children of James and Jodie Bray. She has called Virginia home ever since she married Heard Langford in her 20s. The couple first settled in Suffolk and then Richmond, following dairy plant jobs. They had three children: Jerry, who died in 2020

at the age of 86; Chesterfield resident Anne Barden, 87; and Martha, 70, their "surprise baby," she explains, who lives in Wilson, North Carolina, and visits her mother just about every weekend when possible.

Heard, the plant manager at Richmond's Curles Neck Dairy, died in 1961 on his 51st birthday, leaving Alice to provide for 7-year-old Martha. She got a job working at Westhampton Pastry Shop, located just a block from her house, in 1962.

"I never learned to drive," Langford says. "I just never thought I would be very good at it. I would run down the alley in the morning and go in the back door at the bakery. Whatever came up that they needed

me for, I did, and [I] made a lot of wedding cakes. I never decorated them, though," she says. She worked at the bakery for 25 years, retiring in 1987. "They were like family," she says. "I loved working there."

When Langford is asked what her secret is for a long life, she has an answer ready: "The Lord is responsible for my length of time still to be living."

—**Valerie Hubbard**



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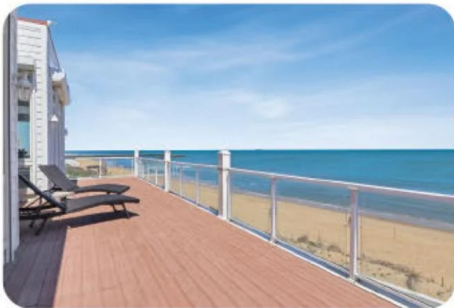
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